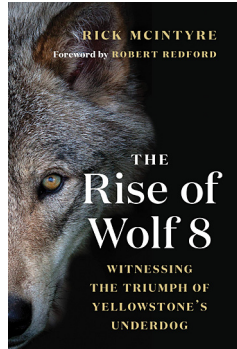


The Rise of Wolf 8: Witnessing the Triumph of Yellowstone's Underdog

By Rick McIntyre. 2019. Greystone Books. 304 pages, 34.95 CAN, 26.95 USD, Cloth.

Rick McIntyre has spent over 40 years observing wolves in national parks, including Denali, Glacier, and Yellowstone. *The Rise of Wolf 8* is part one of a planned trilogy of his nearly 25 years of observing Yellowstone wolves. What is significant about this book is that the author is the source for this story. For the past 20 plus years, many people have written about McIntyre, his colleagues, and the Yellowstone wolves through interviews and television documentaries. But now we get to hear from the man himself. And the book doesn't disappoint. The profiles of individual wolves found in this book are unparalleled for a carnivore, especially here in North America where most carnivores are elusive, usually being active away from people, in forested areas, and at night. As Doug Smith says in the Afterword, "Rick has become a global ambassador for wolves ... what you have just read is one of the most personal and in-depth insights into wolves ever produced" (p. 267). I agree! The only resource that I can compare it to is Jane Goodall's *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* (1986, Belknap Press), which describes the lives of individual chimpanzees in unprecedented detail. The same is true of McIntyre's observations of wolves; his knowledge of individuals provides a remarkable real-life narrative of wild wolves.

Hoping just to see a wolf during the first summer (1995) that they were reintroduced to the park (pp. 19–20), McIntyre observed a pack for hours on his first day there and went on to observe more wild wolves than any other human in history, as documented in the Afterword of this book (pp. 265–267). He has had over 100 000 wolf sightings as of January 2019 (p. 267), aided by radio-telemetry, spotting scopes, and a cadre of wildlife watchers and professionals assisting him. He once went out an indefatigable 6175 consecutive straight days into the park, saw wolves 892 days in a row, and has compiled a journal of over 12 000 pages (pp. 265–266)! Over the years, he has been a critical resource for thousands of people in observing wild wolves which is important because observing carnivores is a major economic driver in many regions (Way and Bruskotter 2012), with people specifically visiting regions where carnivores are protected to have "peak life experiences" (McIntyre 2016). Rick was an important source for



my own book, *My Yellowstone Experience* (2013, White Cottage Publishing), so it is probably not surprising that I was revelling in the opportunity to review this book.

After a brief background describing his childhood and earlier park service jobs, mostly up in Alaska at Denali and in Texas at Big Bend, the book starts in 1994 in Yellowstone where McIntyre was the country's first "Wolf Interpreter" for the park service. There he primed about 25 000 park visitors that summer about the return of wolves to Yellowstone (p. 10). The next few chapters discuss the reintroduction project—some of the human actors involved as well as the early wolves, brought from Alberta (near Jasper National Park) to Yellowstone. We learn that Wolf 8 of the Crystal Creek pack was the smallest male brought to Yellowstone, a Coyote-like 72-pound (32.6-kg), grey coloured male (p. 15) called "the little guy" (p. 29). He was frequently picked on by his three larger brothers while they were held in an acclimation pen to reduce their homing instincts (Chapter 3).

The most important story in the book, and arguably one of the most important events in the annals of Yellowstone wolf reintroduction, was Wolf 8 leaving his birth pack as a 1.5-year-old to join up with Wolf 9 and her eight pups of the Rose Creek pack (Chapter 6). Wolf 9's mate #10 had been illegally killed outside the park in April 1995, so 9 and her pups were brought back to the park soon after and kept in an acclimation pen until October. Just before the planned release of the wolves, 8 showed up and greeted and fed two of the pups who had escaped the pen during a summer storm. Park employees immediately released the rest of the wolves and the ten wolves formed a cohesive pack led by step-father wolf 8 who protected his new pack (e.g., pp. 48–50) and regularly had to go out and hunt prey animals much bigger and stronger than he was (pp. 248–249). Wolf 8 proved his worth by eventually fathering 54 pups over his life (p. 232).

McIntyre moved full-time to Yellowstone in 1999 to immerse himself in the wolves' world (p. 182). Thus, *The Rise of Wolf 8* is highly personalized as it is about individual wolves, similar to *Wild Wolves We Have Known* which details the lives of famous wolves studied around the globe (Way 2016). But two things stand out in McIntyre's book: 1) it is about individual wolves studied in one area; and 2) studying individuals is becoming more and more frequent, despite the stereotype that biologists shouldn't ascribe names and emotions to their study subjects. Thus, this book normalizes the importance of individual—not just populations of—animals. We clearly see that wolves

have individual personalities, are social, and love to play—all characteristics of higher-order animals like humans. We learn that play is vitally important for bonding within packs as well as preparing them for real world circumstances; McIntyre provides a list and vivid descriptions of these games throughout the book (e.g., pp. 210, 227, 228, 242).

The culmination of the book was “The Battle of Specimen Ridge” (Chapter 27) between Wolf 8’s Rose Creek pack and his step-son 21’s Druid Peak pack. McIntyre’s Shakespearean description of the encounter is absolutely riveting. He noted that 8’s determination to battle the much larger 21, who was undefeated in battle situations with other wolves (p. 263), was the bravest thing he had ever seen, “a fight that 21 could not lose and one 8 could not win” (p. 257). Wolves 8 and 21 were never known to have killed other wolves and there are repeated accounts throughout the book of them letting rivals go (p. 262). This is exceptional because they were both alpha wolves for years and wolves killing each other is the most common cause of death where people don’t kill them (p. 179). Wolf 8 was battle-worn and had many debilitating injuries (pp. 247–248). Yet he soldiered on, fueled solely by willpower (p. 249), until June 2000 when he died from either an Elk’s kick to his head or drowning soon afterward (p. 260). Dying in combat, McIntyre noted, was an honourable ending to his life—it was a good death (p. 261).

At the beginning of the book McIntyre noted (p. xix) that all the elements of a great tale are present, including warfare, betrayal, murder, bravery, compassion, empathy, and loyalty, yet a literary genius such as Dickens or Shakespeare was not available to write

this story. I disagree. I believe that McIntyre himself was the perfect person to write this wonderful account. He combines his extraordinary level of observation of wolves with great storytelling (p. 265).

For fans of *Yellowstone* or wolves, this book is priceless, with a historic feel to it that is palpable. I wholeheartedly recommend it and believe that readers interested in nature, carnivores, and individual animals will be fascinated to learn about the wolves described here and in forthcoming volumes of McIntyre’s planned trilogy. McIntyre (2016) has described viewing *Yellowstone* wolves as a “peak life experience”. Reading this book and gaining the insights into *Yellowstone* wolves that McIntyre provided in unparalleled detail was a ‘peak reading experience’ for me! I eagerly await the next edition of the *Yellowstone* wolf saga.

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