

## **International Wolf Magazine**

### **870F—The Final Chapter on a Wolf with True Grit** by Kirsty Peake

#### **Previously, in the Fall 2014 issue of International Wolf:**

In February 2013, Doug Smith's Yellowstone Wolf Project team radio-collared 870F, a female wolf in the newly formed Junction Butte pack. 870F and the breeding male (BM) were mating when the rest of the pack jumped on the pair. 870F sustained a catastrophic neck injury. Disabled and unable to keep up with the pack, she lost status as the breeding female. She fought to survive through the winter of 2013-14 and eventually regained her status with a new mate, 890M, as her BM. They had five pups; three disappeared after inter-pack skirmishes and one was shot outside the park by hunters.

#### **To continue....**

After spending so much time watching the injured, struggling 870F, I was keen to find her again when we returned to Yellowstone for the winter of 2014-15. The pack appeared fit but this season was to be another emotional roller coaster for those of us who follow the wolves of Yellowstone.

In the history of the pack, when 870F became breeding female, she and her mate were particularly hard on her sister, 970F, continually pinning her and finally forcing her to leave the pack, after which the sister joined with 911M, a transient wolf.

970F reappeared in the Junction Butte area with her mate, and in early December, 870F was attacked—probably by her sister. 870F left the pack badly injured. The winter study crew assigned to the pack finally found her.

Brenna Cassidy, the crew leader, told me, “We saw her curled up and thought for sure that we were watching her die. We thought that when we came out next morning we would have a mortality signal.”

After a warm night and no signal, the observers were relieved. By the second day they could see the wolf's wounds through the scope—cuts and dried blood on the left side of her head and back legs covered in dried blood. She painfully roused and moved a short distance. In the afternoon a raven flew near and pulled tufts of fur from her tail. She snapped at it, but was unable to rise.

“We were prepared for a mortality signal the next day, and we tried not to get our hopes up too much,” Cassidy said. “On the third morning we found her and then heard howling over the Specimen Ridge trailhead from the rest of the pack. 870F got up and travelled toward them, crossing the road. She still looked stiff, but she was trotting and moving, and went up and over the ridge. That day Dan Stahler was in the Wolf Project plane and saw her trailing the rest of the pack. She had gone out of sight for us.”

I found 870F a few days later, and with the scope I was able to study her carefully. The new attack had aggravated the neck injury. Her head hung low, and she was scent trailing 890M. For all that, she looked good as she lay down, looking straight at me—such a striking wolf. The others started to howl, all greeting in a snowfield. 870F took part, her tail high.

The next time we saw them, 911M and 970F had taken over the pack. They were on Slough Flats with the yearlings and 870F's confused pups. 890M howled off to the east, and the pups were torn between staying with the new leaders and the yearlings or joining their father. 890M was allowed back into the pack and became the second ranking male. 870F was, once again, on her own.

I next saw her about two miles from Slough Flats, in the Little America area of the park, and hardly recognized her—a wolf travelling confidently through heavy snow, and in good condition. When she climbed up on a rock, lay down and rested her head on her forepaws, I knew it was her.

In Lamar Canyon she scavenged on a carcass, disappeared for a few days and then came out of the trees to check on the carcass. On her own she was vulnerable and unable to hunt. She crossed the road and moved up the hill, through the trees and rocks. I did not realise then that this would be the last time I would see her alive.

From there 870F travelled up through Slough to the meadows above. This was to be her final resting place. Each day the Wolf Project crew monitored her radio signal. When the 'mortality' signal was received, a crew led by Ky Koitzsch with Gracie Glynn and Nels Christensen from the Wolf Project hiked in to retrieve her. I was very touched when they asked me to hike in and meet them. No hesitation. It was the proudest and saddest time to be part of the crew that brought 870F home.

Here was a wolf living life in the wild, and we saw just how tough and torturous it could be. A wolf's drive is to survive and to reproduce. 870F achieved that, and one of her pups, now a yearling, will carry on her genes.

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*Kirsty Peake is a qualified animal behaviourist working in the field of companion animals. She specialises in working with reactive dogs. Her fascination with wolves and their behaviour stemmed from a lifetime of living and working with dogs. She is a Specialist Advisor with the UK Wolf Conservation Trust.*