

# Can You Turn A Wolf Into A Dog

## *Commonly Asked Questions about Wolves and Hybrids in Captivity*

**By Pat Tucker & Bruce Weide  
Wild Sentry  
Copyright 1998**

*Pat Tucker, a wildlife biologist, and Bruce Weide, a writer and storyteller, co-direct Wild Sentry. Wild Sentry is a non-profit environmental education organization blending science and the humanities to produce educational programs and materials that provide a better understanding of the world around us. In one of Wild Sentry's most popular programs, Pat and Bruce work with a wolf named Koani to present information about the gray wolf to schools and community groups. Wild Sentry took responsibility for Koani in 1991, when she was three months old. Koani's was born in captivity to be part of a television documentary for which Pat and Bruce were consultants. More information on what it's been like to have the responsibility of Koani's care can be obtained at the Wild Sentry web site and in the book, *There's a Wolf in the Classroom!* and *Tales of Two Canines: The Adventures of a Wolf and a Dog* by Pat and Bruce.*

***Note:** Throughout this booklet, the term "hybrid" refers to a genetically high-percentage wolf hybrid, which display primary wolf appearance and behaviors.*



### **DEDICATION**

This brochure is dedicated to Koani, a gray wolf spending her life in captivity as an ambassador for her wild kin. While we know she has won hearts and minds in her role as a traveling teacher, not a day goes by that we aren't made painfully aware of the inadequacies of us and our dog as surrogate pack mates, and of the limitations captivity places on Koani's behavior. We often regret that this life has not found her racing through flower-sprinkled meadows, engaging in rough-and-tumble play with her pups, and leaping through frosty air to grab the snorting nose of a moose. Since it has not, we can only hope that this brochure will result in fewer wolves and hybrids being born in captivity, where they are necessarily consigned to lead impoverished lives when compared to their wild brethren.

## INTRODUCTION

You wouldn't raise a Bengal tiger kitten and expect it to grow up with the personality of house cat, would you? Probably not. Nevertheless, many people actually believe that with plenty of love and attention, they can turn a wolf into a dog. Despite their similarities, wolves and dogs are different animals. Call it evolution, call it selective breeding, call it God's Plan-a wolf is not a dog. This brochure examines the misconceptions and fallacies about keeping these animals as "pets."

The information presented here is based on our personal experience with an ambassador wolf, hundreds of stories from hybrid owners and breeders, our review of available scientific literature, and discussions with employees of organizations that keep captive wolves for educational or research purposes. Our interest in writing this brochure is to provide people with a biological understanding of how and why wolves and hybrids behave as they do in captivity. We hope that such understanding will lead to fewer animals being irresponsibly bred and acquired, and inspire safer and more humane handling of existing wolves and hybrids. If you are interested in more in-depth information on this subject, we highly recommend that you consult the references at the end of this brochure. The evolution of dogs and wolves and their resultant behavior is a fascinating subject well worth exploring. Further reading will not only lead you to a deeper understanding of the issues raised in this brochure, but also increase your appreciation and enjoyment of that unique and wonderful animal with which so many of us are privileged to share our homes and lives: the dog.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to Scott Kravitz, who initiated this project and wrote a first draft. The project grew considerably beyond that beginning. As they say, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." Thanks, Scott, for taking that first step. We greatly appreciate the following for reviewing and commenting on this brochure. However, our acknowledgement does not imply their endorsement. All opinions and errors found in the brochure are the responsibility of the authors.

- Monty Sloan, Jill Moore and Pat Goodman: Wolf Park
- Janice Hood: The International Wolf Center
- Graham Neale: Wildlife Biologist
- Lori Schmidt: Biologist
- Megan Parker: Wolf Education and Research Center
- Edward Weaver & Anne Cavanaugh: hybrid caretakers
- Bonnie Tucker: public educator, wolf specialist
- Carol Alette: National Wildlife Federation

## QUESTIONS

1. *"I've heard that dogs and wolves are the same species, and it sure seems like there are more differences between a Chihuahua and a St. Bernard than between a wolf and German shepherd. Is there really a difference between wolves and dogs?"*

The wolf is the ancestor of all dog breeds that exist today. Wolves and dogs are very similar genetically, *but* the seemingly insignificant differences in their genetic structure create hormonal changes that result in vastly different behaviors.

Sometime between 20,000 and 100,000 years ago, a few wolves began scavenging around human encampments. Since that first association, humans have exerted great selective pressure (some consciously, some not) for canines that are less skittish, territorial, predatory and aggressive than wolves. Research has determined that the hormonal systems of canines with these traits (i.e. dogs) are different from those of wild canids. Those hormonal differences cause profound differences in behavior; they result in an animal that never really behaves like a mature canine. In a nutshell, a dog is a wolf in arrested development; they act very much like adolescent wolves their whole lives. An adolescent wolf is playful, adaptable, and able to form bonds with other species, takes directions readily, and is far less territorial and predatory than an adult wolf—all traits that make dogs such delightful companions. As an adolescent wolf's hormonal system reaches maturity (between 18 months and three years), it begins to exhibit all those normal adult behaviors that make wolves so difficult to deal with in captivity (see question #6).

So, while many taxonomists recognize the dog as a subspecies of the wolf and the genetics of the two are quite similar, it is a misconception that these facts prove the wolf and the dog are the same animal. When hybrid breeders and enthusiasts argue that wolves and dogs are essentially the same because they share so much common genetic material, stop to consider this: ninety-eight and four-tenths percent (98.4%) of the genetic material in humans and chimpanzees is identical, yet our behaviors are radically different. Certainly no one would promote crossbreeding humans and chimpanzees as a way to create an animal that is "the best of both worlds."

## 2. *"What is a hybrid?"*

In common usage, a hybrid is the offspring of a cross between a wolf and a dog, a wolf and a hybrid, a dog and a hybrid, or two hybrids. Hybrids are also known as wolf dogs. Hybrids are generally defined in one of four ways. The most common way is verbal; a person simply says their animal is a hybrid. It may have a wolf ancestor, or it may not (see question #5). The second way is by appearance and behavior. If the canine displays primary wolf behaviors and appearance, it may be defined as a hybrid or wolf (see questions #4 and #6). A third way is by ancestry; in other words, any canine that has a wolf ancestor (no matter how many generations ago) is a hybrid. Hybrids defined this way may actually be all or mostly dog or all or mostly wolf (see question #3). Finally, a hybrid may be defined by its genetic makeup. While genetics are the only way to determine how much wolf and dog is in a hybrid (see question #3), at this time our genetic tests are not sophisticated enough to make this determination. Throughout this brochure, the term "hybrid" refers to a genetically high-percentage wolf hybrid, which will necessarily display primary wolf appearance and behaviors (see questions #3, #4 and #6).

3. ***"How can I tell if Tundra is 63.5% Arctic wolf and 36.5 % malamute, like the breeder said?"***

You can't. Ancestry and genetics are not the same thing. While you can easily determine the ancestry of an animal (provided you know the parents' ancestry), it's impossible to determine the genetic makeup of offspring that result from breeding hybrids. Pups receive half of their genes from each parent, so when a pure wolf breeds with a pure dog, each pup is genetically 50% wolf and 50% dog. At this point, ancestrally speaking, they're also 50/50.

Now let's say that one of those pups grows up and mates with another 50/50 hybrid. In terms of ancestry, the resultant pups will be 50% wolf and 50% dog. However, the genetics of those second-generation hybrids aren't easily determined. Pups receive half of their genetic composition from each parent, but whether they receive the dog half, the wolf half, or a combination is indeterminable. Each parent passes on thousands of genes. While a pup's genetic makeup is unlikely to be to be one extreme or the other, it may fall anywhere between 100% dog and 100% wolf. For this reason, it's grossly inaccurate for anyone to claim that their animal, in a genetic sense, is 63.5% wolf. Here's the bottom line: Any time you breed a hybrid to another canine, you're playing genetic roulette.

No test exists that can reveal the genetic makeup of a hybrid puppy. And remember, it's genetics, not ancestry that determines adult personality and behavior.

4. ***"What are the physical differences between wolves, hybrids and dogs?"***

Wolves have narrower chests, proportionally larger feet and teeth, and longer legs than dogs. Their eyes are more almond-shaped than dogs', and the inside their ears are well furred and never flop. Wolves' tails, while they may be held down or up, never have a curl to them. Dogs usually have some curve to their tails. In contrast to dogs which breed twice a year and can produce pups at any time, wolves breed only once a season. Wolf pups are always born in the spring or early summer. It is important to remember that there are no physical features that conclusively separate a wolf from a hybrid from a dog.

Genetically high-percentage hybrids may be physically and behaviorally indistinguishable from a wolf. The smaller the percentage of wolf genetics in a hybrid, the more dog-like its appearance and behavior will be.

5. ***"My friend says her animal is 98% wolf, and she paid a lot of money for it. It sure acts like a dog; why would she say it isn't?"***

Unfortunately, a market exists for wolves and for hybrids that are predominantly wolf. Such pups may sell for hundreds of dollars. These animals are often sold to naive people by breeders who greatly exaggerate the percentage of wolf in the pup. Sometimes breeders do this knowingly to increase the price, and sometimes they are simply ignorant of the difference between genetics and ancestry. Either way, the pups' new owners may be unaware that their animals are dogs or mostly dogs, and therefore hold them out to friends and family as wolves or genetically high-percentage wolf hybrids. Naturally, these canines are the

"hybrids" one most often meets on the beach, in town, playing with children, etc. Because of the characteristics outlined in question #6, true wolves and high-percentage hybrids are not commonly seen in public.

6. *"What behaviors will a wolf or hybrid exhibit that dogs generally don't?"*

A well-behaved wolf is not a well-behaved dog. The wolf behaviors discussed below have enabled wolves to survive as wild animals for millions of years. Unfortunately, these healthy, normal, natural drives are extremely difficult to deal with in captivity, and "proper" training doesn't eliminate them. While dogs often exhibit these behaviors to some degree, they've been greatly altered by generations of selective breeding (see question #1). In wolves and hybrids, these wild characteristics are strongly expressed – it is unrealistic and inhumane for people to expect such animals to suppress them.

**Dominance:** As puppies, wolves and hybrids readily accept domination by their human owners. This makes sense because under natural circumstances a wolf pup's survival depends on its willingness to submit to elder pack members. However, by the end of their second year they have matured sexually; it is at this time that they often challenge their owners for the dominant role. In the wild, wolves have a strong incentive to become dominant because usually only the strongest female and male members of the pack—the alphas—breed. Subordinate pack members may attack a dominant wolf that displays signs of weakness. In interactions with its human "alpha," a captive wolf or hybrid may interpret clues as subtle as fatigue, frustration, or a twisted ankle as weakness and initiate a dominance battle that is potentially lethal. Dominance battles also occur between wolves, hybrids, and their canine companions, be they dogs, wolves or hybrids. In the wild a subordinate wolf may choose to leave, but obviously this avoidance behavior isn't an option within the confines of an enclosure. Therefore, it is not unusual for captive wolves and hybrids to seriously injure or kill pen mates. Additionally, the proper social manners of a wolf or hybrid can harm a child. When two wolves greet, they lick faces, bite muzzles, and straddle one another to communicate dominance. Such "greetings" from an animal that weighs 100 pounds or more can easily frighten and potentially endanger a child.

**Predatory behavior:** In North America there has never been a verified account of a healthy, wild wolf killing a human. Unfortunately, this is not the case with captive wolves and hybrids. A child running, screaming, stumbling or crying may trigger a predatory response (even in an animal that has always been "great with kids"), resulting in serious injury or death of the child. Once this predator-prey response has been stimulated, the animal may never again view children as anything but prey. Other animals also arouse wolves' and hybrids' predatory instincts. Cats, small dogs, chickens, sheep and other domesticated animals are not safe in the presence of a hybrid or captive wolf. While we all know many dogs that exhibit this behavior, it is to a lesser and much more controllable degree.

**Territoriality:** Wild wolf packs maintain territories and drive off or kill trespassing wolves. This behavior ensures that packs do not compete for prey within a territory. In captivity, mature wolves and hybrids display territorial behavior by being extremely aggressive with strange dogs. Any meeting is potentially lethal to the dog.

Scent marking, "destructiveness," possessiveness, excessive shyness, pacing, digging, howling: Several other wolf characteristics, while not necessarily dangerous, constitute behaviors undesirable to humans. Scent marking (urination and defecation) may occur anywhere the wolf or hybrid wishes to establish territorial boundaries, which may include the living room sofa. Chewing behavior is another common complaint of hybrid owners, as jaws powerful enough to crush the femur bone of an adult bison quickly dissect any interesting object. An owner rapidly learns that once a wolf or hybrid has taken possession of a favorite shoe, no amount of discipline will help recover it, and an attempt may in fact lead to a serious bite. To a wolf, possession is 100% of the law; **YOU DON'T TAKE THINGS AWAY FROM A WOLF OR HYBRID** unless you're prepared for a fight. Additionally, wolves and hybrids are often quite suspicious and uncomfortable around objects they weren't exposed to as puppies (again, a powerful survival adaptation in the wild). Things that most dogs take in stride, such as umbrellas, people wearing backpacks, overhead ceiling fans, or who-knows-what can panic wolves and hybrids. Extremely shy animals may panic simply at the approach of a stranger. Frightened wolves and hybrids have been known to scale fences that had contained them adequately for years. Panic can cause destruction of property, injury to the animal or loss of control of the animal with resulting injury to someone else. Finally, wolves and hybrids are active and curious. If not given plenty of exercise and mental stimulation (several hours daily-especially during their most active times, dawn and dusk), they can be depended upon to continually pace, move prodigious quantities of earth and howl incessantly.

7. ***"Does environment and handling have any effect on a wolf or hybrid's behavior, or is it all genetic?"***

Of course, environmental conditioning can modify any animal's innate behavior. A properly raised and socialized animal living in an interesting environment will be easier to handle than one that spends its days at the end of a chain. However, just as it is ludicrous to think that a cow raised like a tiger would grow up to act like a tiger, it is ludicrous (and more dangerous) to think compassion, tender love and empathetic nurturing can subvert wolfish behaviors that have evolved over millions of years. Hybrid owners may successfully raise and enjoy one hybrid, only to find that the next hybrid they acquire acts like a wolf, despite the similarities in how the two animals were raised. The difference lies in the genetics of the two animals: The first was primarily dog, the second primarily wolf.

8. ***"Can you train a wolf or hybrid to obey commands?"***

Not really. Wolves and hybrids are much more cat-like than dog-like in their response to training. While they're perfectly capable of learning commands, they cannot be counted on to obey them in frightening or dangerous situations or when they've decided they're bored with the game. These are the times, of course, when it is most important to be able to rely on obedience. This trait is attributable to fact that they are expressing "adult" canine behavior as opposed to the more "juvenile" canine behavior of dogs (see question #1). From an evolutionary perspective it is very important for young wolves to obey older pack members. However, as they reach adulthood it is important for them to assert independence.

9. ***"My neighbor's hybrid was wonderful with the kids. If you raise a hybrid right, won't it be a good pet?"***

We've all heard stories about wolves and hybrids that were wonderful pets. Provided the stories are true, one must recognize that, despite breeders' claims to the contrary, the vast majority of these animals possessed little in the way of wolf genetics and may, in fact, have been full dog (see questions #3 & #5). To reiterate, any time one or more of the parents is a hybrid, there is no way to determine the genetic makeup of their offspring. Many, many animals promoted as 80% wolf are actually dogs or genetically low-percentage wolf hybrids. In addition, one must understand that wolves and hybrids display tremendous variations in behavior. You'll find aberrant behavior in wolves and hybrids, just as you'll find it in people. Countless stories recount how a wolf rescued a child from drowning, or rode in the back of pickup trucks, or slept in bed with the owner without so much as wrinkling a sheet (let alone ripping the bed to shreds). Supposing such stories are true, this behavior is aberrant; it's not normal and not to be expected. It's interesting to ask the owners what became of their "wonderful pet." The story often ends in tragedy: "It killed the neighbor dog" or "ran away" or "attacked a child and had to be put to sleep... but until then it was a really great pet." If the animal is still alive, inquire as to its age (see question #10). Here's another question to ask the hybrid owner and yourself for that matter, "How do you define good pet?"

10. ***"My friend's 89% wolf hybrid is a year old. It's not aggressive around dogs and doesn't kill cats. Won't it stay that way?"***

Perhaps. Time will tell. Wolves and hybrids often don't begin to exhibit mature behavior until they are two or three years old. Therefore, problems associated with maturity such as aggressiveness, extreme shyness or predatory behavior are often not seen until the animal becomes an adult (see question #1). It's impossible to predict how your friend's hybrid will act in the future based on its behavior at one year of age. If it's really a genetically high-percentage wolf hybrid, odds are its behavior will undergo a radical transformation. A preliminary study in Washington state revealed that the average age of privately owned hybrids was much lower than the average age of dogs; this indicates that people don't hold on to hybrids as long as they do dogs. The reason for this, based on anecdotal evidence, is that as hybrids mature, people find them increasingly difficult to handle. The end result is that they are euthanized or, in an act of extreme cowardice, turned loose.

11. ***"Dogs bite a lot of people every year. Are wolves and hybrids really more dangerous?"***

Yes. While it is true that dogs can and do exhibit many wolf behaviors, in general their behavior is genetically altered so that they are much less likely to "follow through" with predatory, dominant and territorial behavior. While many dogs stalk and chase animals, including people, few of them follow through with an actual bite, especially in the case of humans. This is not the result of training; it's due to an inhibition that is genetically based. Because of this, it is difficult or impossible to train many dogs as guard animals (i.e. to actually bite and injure an intruder).

The statistics bear this out. The estimated 300,000 hybrids and captive wolves in the USA killed 10 people between 1986 and 1994 (about 1.25 deaths/year/300,000 hybrids) and injured many more. In contrast, the 50 million dogs in the USA killed an average of 20 people/year (about 0.11 deaths/year/300,000 dogs). Put another way, captive wolves and hybrids are 11 times more likely to fatally maul a human than a dog is. Additionally, bear in mind that many of those 300,000 hybrids actually have little, if any wolf in them. If the statistics were only for wolves and genetically high-percentage wolf hybrids, the rate of fatal attacks would be much higher.

It should be noted that dogs who are selectively bred for attack work and/or "sport" fighting are responsible for most of the deaths caused by dogs and are statistically as dangerous as captive wolves and hybrids. These lineages, like hybrids, are not pets and should not be treated as such.

12. ***"Are wolves and hybrids good guard animals?"***

No. In the wild, non-dominant pack members hang back in the face of intruders or strange situations while the alpha animals decide how to handle the situation. In a captive situation, with the human as alpha (you wouldn't want nor be able to live with an alpha wolf), a wolf or hybrid's natural tendency will be to stay behind while its owner confronts the burglar!

13. ***"Don't native people breed their sled dogs with wolves to create stronger pullers? Wasn't Balto (the famous sled dog that carried serum to Nome, Alaska during a diphtheria epidemic) a hybrid?"***

No to both. While sled dogs share some physical characteristics with wolves, such as thick fur, these characteristics have simply been selected for because they are necessary for a dog's survival in the Arctic. The best sled dogs work well with strange dogs and take commands readily. Wolves and hybrids do not display these behaviors (see question #6). Native people know this and do not allow their valuable sled dogs to breed with wolves.

Despite the 1995 animated version of Balto's heroic journey, the real Balto was a northern sled dog with no wolf ancestry.

14. ***"Aren't wolves and hybrids healthier and smarter than dogs?"***

No. Dogs are extremely diverse genetically. There is absolutely no reason that dogs should have health problems due to inbreeding. The inbreeding problems exhibited by some dog breeds (hip dysplasia, deafness, proneness to eye infections, extreme nervousness) are the result of careless and ignorant breeders and buyers who value a "certain look" over health. These problems can be quickly eliminated in a breed by "out" crossing it with another breed.

While wolves tend to be better able to learn through mimicry, dogs are much quicker at learning abstract commands. Intelligence is a difficult trait to measure. Intelligent behavior in one environment is often stupid behavior in another. The brains of wolves have evolved to deal with problems found in the wild, while the brains of dogs have evolved to deal with



problems found in associating with humans. Neither animal's brain deals very well with problems encountered outside of the environments in which they evolved.

15. ***"Won't neutering a wolf or hybrid make it easier to handle?"***

Neutering will lower the intensity of a wolf or hybrid's attempts to become a dominant animal and certainly should be done. However, for the most part this difference in behavior is evident only during the breeding season. Neutering causes little or no difference in behavior during the rest of the year.

16. ***"Couldn't you create a good hybrid pet by breeding hybrids back to dogs for several generations or selectively breeding captive wolves to be less territorial and predatory?"***

Yes. But it's already been done and the end result is called a dog. When hybrids are bred back to dogs over several generations they produce a genetically low-percentage wolf hybrid that displays dog-like behavior and makes a fine pet. The point is, why reinvent the wheel? You'd end up with a dog--millions of which are in need of good homes now--and in the meantime wolves and genetically high-percentage hybrids will have spent their lives in captivity to produce your pet.

Selectively breeding wolves or hybrids to eliminate "bad behavior" would require:

- starting with a large population of wolves (to ensure a genetically healthy ancestry);
- selecting only the "best behaved" animals to breed (what do you do with the rest?); and
- choosing only the "best behaved" of the offspring from those litters to breed (once again, what do you do with the rest?) and so on.

If you were an expert in genetics and animal behavior and started with hundreds of animals, after 30 or 40 generations you would likely have an animal that was genetically healthy and would make a decent pet. Et voila, you would have recreated the same animal that humans created thousands of years ago: the dog. Again, why subject many generations of wolves and hybrids to early euthanasia or life in captivity to recreate an animal that already exists, with a huge variety of appearances and behaviors to choose from?

17. ***"A hybrid breeder told me that hybrids don't make good pets and shouldn't be considered pets, but that they can be your 'best friend.' What does that mean?"***

Breeders who have had long-term experience with wolves and hybrids almost universally caution that hybrids are not for everyone, and that people who have them need to be prepared to deal with them very differently than with dogs. They often refer to the relationship not as a master-pet relationship but as a "friendship" (meaning that hybrids can't be ignored, can't be expected to be obedient, etc., thereby implying that somehow this makes the relationship deeper and more meaningful). However, few of us keep our "friends" locked in cages when we're at work or on a leash when we go for a walk on the beach. And few of us choose "friends" who destroy our car upholstery or can't be left alone with our children.

**18. "Is it legal for people to own wolves and hybrids?"**

It depends. No federal laws exist to regulate wolf and hybrid ownership, as long as the animals are legally obtained (not removed from an endangered wild population) and are not being exhibited. However, many states, counties and cities do have regulations governing their ownership and care.

**19. "I'm concerned about a hybrid living a couple blocks away. It's chained up and has gotten loose a few times. What should I do?"**

Check with city, county and state officials to make sure the animal's registration and facilities are in compliance with the law. If they are not, demand that officials enforce compliance. If they are in compliance, make sure the owner is educated about hybrids and that neighborhood children know how to behave around hybrids (see question #20). File a written complaint for all incidents involving the animal, no matter how minor. If enough minor complaints are lodged, officials may be able to take action before a serious incident occurs. If a serious incident does occur, a written record of incidents will help ensure a serious response.

**20. "What should I teach my child about behavior around canines?"**

- Never stick fingers, hands, possessions or food of any kind through a fence or cage unless a qualified keeper is present and says you may (this goes for any kind of animal). Many accidents happen when an animal grabs fingers or hands stuck through a fence.
- Never approach chained canines unless their owner is present and says you may.
- Never try to interact with a canine in any way unless its owner is present and says you may. (And even then, proceed with caution.) What a child interprets as playing may be viewed by a canine as teasing, threatening, intruding, etc.
- Anytime a canine is around, adults should closely supervise children who are too young to obey rules. Children and adults without proper training should never be allowed to interact with wolves or hybrids without close supervision by a qualified, trained handler.
- If you feel a canine is threatening you-be it hybrid or dog-the following behavior will minimize the risk of attack:
  1. Do not run or make quick movements of any kind.
  2. Tuck your arms close to your sides and cover your throat with your hands.
  3. Talk softly, slowly and in as low and confident a voice as possible.
  4. Keep your eyes on the animal, but do not stare intently into its eyes.
  5. Back away slowly, being careful not to trip or fall.
- Should the animal jump up on you and/or attack, protect your face and throat with your hands, brace yourself, try to stay on your feet and continue moving away.

**21. "I understand all the issues and I'm going to get a hybrid anyway. What do I need to do to keep one safely and humanely?"**

The following are the minimum standards for keeping a wolf or hybrid safely and humanely in captivity:

1. Build an enclosure surrounded by two layers of fencing: an inner chain link fence ten feet high that extends two feet underground, and an outer fence eight feet high with at least four feet between the two fences. The outer fence should be posted with warning signs, and the gate should be locked at all times.
2. Provide at least 1/2 acre for each animal, and fill it with plenty of environmental stimulation: shelters, vegetation, platforms, large water containers, etc.
3. Keep at least two animals per enclosure. Canines-especially wolves and hybrids-are very social animals and need canine companionship. For the greatest assurance of lifetime compatibility, the animals should be of the opposite sex and introduced as young as possible, preferably before they are six months old.
4. Provide meat, hide and bones on a regular basis. Debilitating diarrhea may result from feeding wolves and hybrids only commercial dog food.
5. Obtain the knowledge necessary to handle wolves and hybrids. Learn about special techniques for raising and socializing them. Without an understanding of these techniques, you may end up with an unmanageable animal. Wolf Park, Battle Ground, IN (765-567-2265) regularly conducts seminars on the subject.
6. Make sure at least one other person is trained and familiar with the animals, to provide relief-care in emergencies.
7. Retain a veterinarian experienced with wolves or willing to do the necessary research and consultation to competently treat them.
8. Recognize that since no legally recognized rabies vaccine exists for wolves and hybrids, authorities are acting within their responsibilities if they require an animal that has bitten someone (even in play) to be euthanized.
9. Obtain all necessary state and local permits. These can be expensive and difficult to acquire. They may be impossible to acquire in urban areas.
10. Never allow children or other animals to come into direct contact with the animals, except in controlled, supervised situations, and then only with full understanding of the possible consequences for all involved if an injury occurs.
11. Never allow the animals to run loose.
12. Purchase adequate liability insurance.
13. Be prepared to spend a minimum of one hour per day, every day, interacting directly with the animals.
14. Neuter the animals.
15. Plan to provide all of the above for the lifetime of these animals-as long as 18 years.

Note that many of these steps must be taken before you acquire the animals. Remember, these animals did not ask to be born or ask you to acquire them. If you don't have the financial and emotional stability to provide them with the minimum standards outlined above, DON'T GET THEM!

22. ***"I made a mistake and got a hybrid without fully understanding what I was getting into. I can't keep it safely anymore. What should I do?"***

Do not pass your responsibility on to an unsuspecting party. A few organizations (the Internet is a good resource) provide care for unwanted wolves and hybrids, but requests to place these animals greatly outpace available openings. You may try to place your animal in one of these facilities, but first you should visit the facility to determine whether it will provide a reasonable life for the animal. It is difficult for hybrids and wolves to adapt to new surroundings and new people. It is imperative that you are honest about what is best for your animal. Passing your responsibility on to someone else may make you feel better, but often the least cruel fate is to take responsibility and humanely euthanize your animal.

23. ***"Couldn't I just release it into the wild?"***

No! Unless they are part of a special governmentally run program (where they are taught wild survival skills and are kept from becoming socialized to humans), captive wolves cannot legally or humanely be released into the wild. They do not have the hunting skills necessary for survival, and because they are socialized to humans they will seek food near human habitations. "Released" hybrids and wolves slowly starve to death and/or create problems that may be blamed on wild wolves. A released captive wolf or hybrid is much more likely to be killed by a wild wolf than to mate with it. However if, due to highly unusual circumstances, a hybrid bred with a wild wolf, the resultant hybrid offspring would compromise the genetic soundness of wild wolves.

24. ***"Having a captive wolf or hybrid may fulfill some personal needs or desires. Does private ownership also contribute to the survival of wolves in the wild?"***

No. One needs to question the motives for wolf and hybrid ownership. Many people naively believe that owning a wolf or hybrid helps wild wolves because it keeps the genes "alive." At best, these people accomplish absolutely nothing, as these "pets" can never be used to establish wild wolf populations. At worst, should this "pet" rip off a child's arm (as one did in Lolo, Montana) or kill livestock or pets, it reinforces age-old fears of the wolf. A wolf's social and physical environment can never be duplicated in captivity. Clearly, individual animals don't benefit from this arrangement. If you love wolves, there are two ways to help them: fight for their survival in the wild and preserve their habitat. Write letters to government officials and urge them to protect natural habitats. Learn about wolves (the whole story, not just what you want to hear), and share your information with others. Support and volunteer for organizations that work politically and educationally to preserve wild wolves; this includes some, but not all, organizations that hold wolves in captivity-question

their objectives before you support them. In time you will find that you don't have to possess wolves for them to become an important part of your life. Besides, don't you think it's tragically ironic to want to own and control wildness? A wild pet is an oxymoron.

25. ***"Is there any reason to breed and maintain wolves in captivity?"***

While there are obviously many philosophical arguments, pro and con, the following summarizes Wild Sentry's position on wolves in captivity:

Having or allowing a wolf to be born into captivity in no way benefits the individual animal. Therefore, the only justifiable reason to have captive wolves is to benefit wild wolves. Captivity may be justified if the captive animal is maintained in as psychologically and physically humane an environment as possible (see question #21), and if the animal is part of:

1. A well-developed, professional exhibit that furthers public understanding and tolerance for wild wolves; or
2. a peer-reviewed scientific research project that furthers human understanding of wolf behavior and habitat requirements; or
3. a government-sanctioned breeding program for the purpose of reestablishing wild wolf populations.

26. ***"Are you saying that captive wolves and hybrids should be euthanized if they aren't providing any of the purposes outlined in question #25?"***

Not necessarily. Those that are housed unsafely and/or inhumanely should be euthanized or placed in a different facility. However, many people have acquired these animals inadvertently or without full knowledge of what they were getting into. Despite this, they have taken responsibility for the animals' care (at great expense and modification of life style), their animals are neutered and they are not being promoted as pets. In these cases we see no reason that the animals should not be allowed to live out their natural lives in private ownership.

**CONCLUSION** (Letter from a Hybrid Owner)

To whom it may concern:

So you want a wolf-dog? Please answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions:

1. Do you have the proper facilities to contain the animal? (i.e. so that it will NEVER, EVER leave your property unattended. It's as easy as a puff of wind opening a not quite closed front door.)

2. Are you ready to accept the animal as it is, rather than an extension of your own ego? There is nothing "cool" about owning a wolf-dog. The responsibilities are too overwhelming.
3. Are you prepared to remain unruffled and unafraid while watching the animal as it begins to "psyche out" a terrified child or wary adult? Wolf-dogs seem to "feed" on such vibrations.
4. Can you handle a confrontation? How will you react if the animal turns on you?
5. Can you stand the horror, humiliation and anger after the animal has bitten the neighbor's child?
6. Can you bear the thought of it harming your own child?
7. Are you ready to comply with the "dangerous dog" acts many counties are employing to curb dog bite problems? They include:
  1. \$75.00 to \$1,000.00 fee PER year to keep the animal,
  2. mandatory liability insurance of at least \$50,000.00,
  3. a class C FELONY action against YOU if the animal bites more than once, and/or
  4. fines up to \$5,000.00 and /or one year of imprisonment.
8. Can you afford to employ a PROFESSIONAL trainer to help control the animal and educate you on wolf and dog psychology? KENNEL CLUB training does not count!
9. Are you ready to take these responsibilities "'till death do you part"? Because giving or selling the animal is only passing the problem on to someone else, their children, friends, neighbors and county authorities. And while we're at it, will you be responsible enough to neuter the animal rather than letting it pass on these problems to others through its progeny?

This test is neither Pass nor Fail. You know how you did.

I didn't know any of this nine years ago when I adopted my wolf-dog. And I have been through all of the above as well as spent over \$7,000.00 on proper containment, training and attorney fees. In spite of it all, my wolf-dog stays with me because he has no where else to go. But the oppressive liability of it overshadows us daily. These questions are depressing at best. But they must be asked...and answered truthfully.

Sincerely, Name Withheld

## REFERENCES and MORE READING

- Belyaev, D.K. January 1969. Domestication of animals. Science Journal.
- Boitani, L. & Ciucci, P. 1995. Comparative social ecology of feral dogs and wolves. Ethology, Ecology and Evolution. 7:49-72.
- Bok, B. July/August 1974. The wolf as a pet. Northern Dog News.
- Coppinger, R.P. & Feinstein, M. January 1991. Why Dogs Bark. Smithsonian Magazine, pp. 119-129.
- Coppinger, R.P. & Smith, C.K. 1989. A model for understanding the evolution of mammalian behavior. In: Current Mammalogy, (Ed. by H. Genoways), Vol. 2, pp. 33-74.
  
- Coppinger, R.P., et al. 1987. Degree of behavioral neoteny differentiates canid polymorphs. Ethology, 75:89-108.
- Crane, C. March/April 1991. Wolves in dogs' clothing. Animals.
- Crisler, L. 1968. Captive Wild. Harper and Rowe.
- Frank, H. 1980. Evolution of canine information processing under conditions of natural and artificial selection. Z. Tierpsychol. 53:389-399.
- Goodwin, D., Bradshaw, J.W.S., & Wickens, S.M. 1997. Paedomorphosis affects agonistic visual signals of domestic dogs. Animal Behavior. 53:297-304.
- Haines, C. 1993. A preliminary study of the wolf hybrid population in Washington state. A research project done in conjunction with Wolf Haven International, Tenino, Washington.
- Hope, J. June 1994. Wolves and wolf hybrids as pets are big business-but a bad idea. Smithsonian Magazine, pp. 34-45.
- Jenkins, T. Winter 1991. How High the Price? Humane Society of the United States News.
- Klinghammer, E. A Wolf for a pet? Distributed by Wolf Park, Battleground, IN 47920.
- MacRury, I.I. 1991. The Inuit dog: its provenance, environment and history. M.Phil. thesis, Scott Polar Research Inst., Univ. Cambridge.
- Moore, J. So you think you want a wolf? Distributed by Wolf Park, Battleground, IN 47920.
- Schmidt, L. 1992. Issues relating to management of wolves or wolf/dog hybrids in captivity. Distributed by Lori Schmidt, Vermillion College, Ely, MN 55731. 45 pp.
- Schwartz, M. 1997. A History of Dogs in the Early Americas. New Haven:Yale Univ. Press.
- Serpell, J. 1995. The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behaviour, and Interactions with People. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Sloan, M. Of wolves, wolf hybrids and children. Distributed by Wolf Park, Battleground, IN 47920.
- Weide, B. & Tucker, P. 1995. There's a Wolf in the Classroom! Minneapolis: Carol/Rhoda Press.
- Willems, R.A. 1994/95. The wolf-dog hybrid: an overview of a controversial animal. AWIC Newsltr. Vol. 5, No. 4: 3-8.

*We'd like to make the booklet available to animal shelters, veterinarians, pet stores, wolf organizations and individuals who want to learn the facts about this issue or see value in passing*

*the booklet on to people thinking of getting a hybrid. In terms of distribution we can only accomplish so much—and that's where you come in. If you work or volunteer at an animal shelter, you've dealt with hybrids and know the need for educating people before they buy a cute hybrid puppy and then bring it to you to deal with 18 months later. Ask your veterinarian, animal shelter, and pet shop owner if they're interested in making the booklet available. For a single copy send \$2.00 to the address listed below. For information on bulk rates, please email or write.*

*More information on what it's been like to have the responsibility of Koani's care can be obtained at the Wild Sentry web site and/or in the book *There's a Wolf in the Classroom!* by Pat and Bruce.*

Wild Sentry - Box 172 - Hamilton, Montana 59840

E-Mail: [wildsent@bitterroot.net](mailto:wildsent@bitterroot.net) - Web Site: [www.bitterroot.net/wild](http://www.bitterroot.net/wild)