

FATAL ENCOUNTER

When wild wolves become used to humans, bad things inevitably happen.

By Laura Schneberger

Losing a child is an unnatural life event. Only those who have borne a similar loss can understand. Sadly, the family of 22-year-old Kenton Carnegie has joined that group.

Kenton was a third-year geological engineering graduate student at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. He worked at Points North Landing in Saskatchewan as part of his fall term co-op program. He was killed Nov. 8, 2005, by a pack of wild Canadian gray wolves.

The wolf recovery and protection camp considers the incident to be a fluke, an anomaly. The tragic circumstances surrounding Kenton's death leave no peace or comfort for his family. A medical report lists the cause of death as "large canine bites, likely wolves." Overwhelming forensic and photographic evidence has been introduced. Four wolves were present at the scene. The investigating Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer told Kenton's father that it was necessary to fire warning shots to disperse those wolves to secure the scene. Yet the resolution of a biological investigation confirming the cause of death has not occurred.

One might argue that this lack of closure could be due to the troubling nature of the event, but it is more likely due to the political ramifications that surround it. The difficulty in establishing an official reason for the attack may be that biologists working in wolf recovery have trouble discarding the comfortable notion that such a thing has never happened before.

Meanwhile, the family waits. They feel they deserve the truth. They hope that people armed with factual information about the incident will be better protected in the future. That is not much to ask for the price of a son's life.

Facts surrounding any controversial incident are usually difficult to sift. This one has been no different. Several incorrect bits of information have been released to the public and even published in high-profile outdoor publications. Soon after the funeral, speculation began that Kenton, an artist, was trying to get close enough to draw a picture of the wolves—a realistic possibility since he was incredibly enthusiastic. It was also reported that Kenton had gotten within feet of the pack and taken photographs. Not true—a case of mistaken identity. A different young man had indeed taken close-up photographs of the pack several days prior to Kenton's death.

One devastating rumor, promoted by biologists investigating the incident, alleges that Kenton might have been feeding the wolves. The truth, as his family knows it, is that Kenton had no camera at the work site. No camera was recovered at the scene. No one knows whether Kenton was even aware of the wolf pack being in the vicinity when he went for a walk. As a hunter and outdoorsman, Kim Carnegie, Kenton's father, says he never promoted feeding or interfering with wildlife, not even ducks in a municipal pond,

when his children were growing up. He believes his son followed that basic moral value. It appears that all Kenton was doing was taking a walk.

Animal activists, whether with valid or invalid intentions, often promote dangerous and incorrect ideals to the general public and those ideals often have negative consequences. Wolf enthusiasts commonly promote the ideals of anthropomorphism. Protection of a major predator, even in the face of overwhelming evidence of real and potential danger, is not only irresponsible, it can also be dangerous. Despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, decades have gone by with wildlife biologists and environmental activists promoting the notion that wolves always avoid people and that there has never been a human fatality attributed to wolves. Even now, despite all the physical evidence surrounding Kenton's death, this myth is still being perpetrated.

Kim Carnegie feels that the pack of four animals that killed his son had been habituated to the community because of the availability of a nearby dump as a food source, which made them less afraid of humans. The more relevant question is: "What really enticed them to stalk a human being?"

Photographs taken before the incident show that the wolves were indeed stalking people. The consistent food availability kept these predators in good condition despite their harsh environment. People living in the area of the mining camp believe the situation was an "accident waiting to happen," directly related to the idealistic protections afforded wolves in many parts of Canada and the United States. Nothing was done to mitigate the wolves' behavior, not even after they had killed several pets in the area. Why was such an obvious warning sign ignored?

Contrary to popular modern wolf myth, many people are reporting dangerous encounters with wolves—and those exposed to the anthropomorphic promotion of such animals are surprised by the behavior dis-



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COURTESY CARNEGIE FAMILY

GRAY WOLF © JOE McDONALD, TOM STACK & ASSOCIATES



played during the encounter. Common sense dictates that once wolves are desensitized enough to confront humans, they should be managed appropriately and, if necessary, lethally controlled.

While this view may seem controversial, the personal safety of human beings should far outweigh the feelings of animal advocates. This belief, shared by many people who have had widespread experiences with wolves, is demonized by advocates who believe all wolves are sacred and deserve complete protection, regardless of behavior. Biologists in wolf research often face career-endangering loss of funding if their conclusions are not unabashedly pro-wolf protection.

The Carnegie tragedy illustrates this disconnect. Lifelong wolf biologist/researcher

Paul Paquet witnessed the necropsies on the animals involved in the attack. Those necropsies turned up evidence to confirm the cir-

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cumstances of the incident. Allowing the forensic work and subsequent report to be approved by a lifetime wolf researcher rather than by a neutral third party seems ludicrous—but that's what happened in this case.

Wild predators should never be

approached by human beings. This basic commonsense principle is underscored in the recent documentary, "Grizzly Man." The movie portrays the work of bear naturalist Timothy Treadwell. Treadwell is shown in video footage he took of himself, touching, swimming with, and generally staying in very close contact with the bears he studied. Treadwell and his lady friend, Amie Huguénard, were eventually killed by a habituated bear. Sadly, his death caused the deaths of two bears that were obviously unafraid of the people who came to investigate the scene.

In Kenton's case, Paquet states that the animals responsible for the attack were habituated to the Points North dump, and desensitized to the presence of humans. Paquet's professional work has involved approving the

use of human-reared, pen-raised wolves as candidates for release in the southwestern part of the United States for the Mexican wolf reintroduction program. Ranching families and small communities similar to those in rural Canada are now encountering desensitized wolves regularly. The “human encounters” section of the Mexican wolf five-year review now reads like a bad novel.

The problem is simultaneously social and biological. Wolves can and do become habituated to humans, perhaps through indirect causes. One problem lies in the impact of government-sponsored, hands-off management of wildlife. Government coordination

with wolf advocates and their wallets, which are always open to provide funding, keeps political pressure on those who believe in hands-on wildlife management.

On one side of the continent, wolves are pen raised. On the other side, they are wild. No objective studies have been done to determine the root causes of habituation and how habituation is interrelated with instinct.

There is no consistency in the field of wolf management other than protection of the animals, regardless of the costs to human safety. What scientists do know continues to evolve and during this evolution all realistic management options should be available,

including lethal control. The safety and security of the human population demands it. As the Carnegie family well knows, uncontrolled wildlife coupled with poor education of the public will continue to yield tragic consequences. ▢

Laura Schneberger lives in southwest New Mexico with her husband and children. To assist his family in remembering a remarkable young man, send contributions to the Kenton Carnegie Memorial Fund at the University of Waterloo, Office of Development, South Campus Hall, 200 University Ave. W., Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1.

KILLER WOLVES: INSTINCT OR BAD HABITS?

The tragic Kenton Carnegie incident is not an isolated one. Contrary to popular modern wolf mythology, many people are reporting dangerous encounters with wolves. In 2004, another Canadian man, Fred Desjarlais, suffered multiple bites in a hand-to-hand battle with a large grey wolf before a busload of co-workers drove the wolf off.

After Kenton's death, an Alaska schoolteacher was chased and bitten by a northern grey wolf. Becky Wanamaker's wounds were on the back of her thighs exactly where bites occur when a lone wolf attacks its prey. Wanamaker locked herself in an outhouse until the wolf left.

A single wolf attacked two families in early September 2006 in Katherine's Cove, a popular tourist spot on Lake Superior along the Trans Canada highway. Six victims in two separate attacks were injured and treated for bites. The three-year-old had to have 15 stitches. All underwent emergency rabies treatment. The full-grown young male wolf shot by park personnel was tested for rabies; test results were negative.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources says that when confronted by a wolf, people should make lots of noise, make eye contact and never run, because there is a good chance the animal will chase you. While wolf education has been taught in elementary school classrooms for years, there appears to be no curriculum or procedure for a three-year-old staring down a wolf that is trying to drag her away. Nor is there an age-appropriate flyer describing how three teenagers and a

mom are to cope with a blitz attack by a single wolf or a pack of wolves.

Canada isn't the only country in North



Scott Richards shows what's left of his hunting dog, Blackey. He lost two dogs on the same day to the same pack of gray wolves, with another critically injured. He credits Blackey with saving his own life. RIGHT: The Gatin family lost their pet after it was mauled by wolves. The dog's injuries were so severe it had to be euthanized.

America dealing with wolf problems. U.S. victims of wolf encounters are also facing the reality of how to respond. Hunters have been forced to shoot wolves that have stalked them and, in some cases, they have been forced to let their dogs become victims to save themselves. In one distressing incident in southwestern New Mexico, a young ranch family had to euthanize their ranch dog after it was mauled by a Mexican wolf. Even worse, it wasn't the first time these children had been traumatized by wolves. Two years ago, the mother and children (then 6 and 4) walked home in the dark after rolling a pickup on an



icy road, and a wolf pack followed them. Luckily no attack occurred.

In the United States, wolf experts are telling people to keep their dogs from areas occupied by wolves. Unfortunately, many rural people have dogs that guard their children. Picking a predator for your kids to face is difficult. Should a large guard dog be kept to discourage cougar and bear or should the family dog be removed so as not to attract a wolf pack?—*Laura Schneberger*