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THE WOLF STUDY AT ISLE ROYALE

Wolf's Eye

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WOLF'S EYE IS THE NAME GIVEN TO THIS MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE ISLE ROYALE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION BECAUSE ON A MAP OF LAKE SUPERIOR, THE LAKE APPEARS AS A PROFILE OF A WOLF'S HEAD WITH ISLE ROYALE SIMULATING THE EYE OF THE WOLF. WOLF'S EYE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN JANUARY, 1957, AS A NEWSLETTER OF ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK, AND IN MARCH OF THAT YEAR THE IRNHA ASSUMED PUBLICATION RESPONSIBILITIES FOR BOTH NEWSLETTER AND NATURAL HISTORY PURPOSES.

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THE WOLF STUDY AT ISLE ROYALE

by L. David Mech

Isle Royale may be the least visited National Park, but it is biologically one of the most important. One of the principle reasons is that it is the only National Park still containing the timber wolf (Canis lupus). In fact, Isle Royale might eventually prove to be the only area in the United States where this interesting predator can live as he did a thousand years ago.

The wolf was formerly widely distributed over the United States, performing the important functions of maintaining strong healthy herds of big game animals and keeping grasslands and forests from being overbrowsed. A primary example is the effect on the American bison. Although the animals numbered into the millions, there are few records of severely diseased or disabled individuals, undoubtedly due to the constant pressure of the timber wolf. Today wolves are found only in Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota, and they are being severely persecuted in these states.

Here on Isle Royale a unique opportunity exists to study the timber wolf under almost laboratory conditions; i.e., under a situation of more known conditions and fewer complicating factors than are normally found in nature. For example, the Park is discrete and of known area. The biological phenomena occurring here are more or less independent of those anyplace else. Also, the animals which affect the life of the wolf are limited to a few species, mainly the moose, beaver and snowshoe hare.

The previous studies of the moose and wolves of Isle Royale by James E. Cole, National Park Service biologist, has shown that it would be both possible and feasible to do comprehensive research on either species. Thus, this biologically golden opportunity only awaited enough funds to be realized.

Dr. Durward L. Allen, professor of wildlife management at Purdue University, quickly discovered this opportunity. His proposal to the National Science Foundation for a 3-year wolf study rated among the highest, and a large sum was granted. This grant forms the major part of the support, although the National Wildlife Federation and the National Park Service also have contributed significant aid. In June, 1958, a conference of interested biologists from Michigan, Minnesota, Newfoundland, and Ontario was held at Isle Royale to make suggestions for a sound beginning. At this time, Dave Mech, principle investigator under Dr. Allen, started his field work. The data obtained will provide material for his PhD dissertation.

The official title of the wolf study is "The Ecology of the Timber Wolf of Isle Royale", a study of the wolves and their relations with other species. No stress on practical information is implied, although undoubtedly the information will have many practical applications. The study includes the following objectives: 1) to obtain a count of the wolves, 2) to discover the limiting factors operating on the wolf population, and 3) to determine the food habits of the wolves. The latter objective involves a study of their hunting, feeding, and traveling habits and a census of the moose. Of course, all this information will be gathered over a three year period and compared year to year.

Methods used to gather the information are many. However, of primary importance is the use of the airplane from February 1st until the spring breakup. Wolves and moose are counted from the air, and the wolves are followed as often as weather permits. Their travel routes are mapped, and their breeding, feeding, and hunting habits noted.

The summer leg of the study is primarily devoted to collecting and analyzing wolf scats to obtain information on summer food habits. However, plans to handle some wolves alive this summer are also being considered. Observations of moose, particularly of the cow/calf ratio, will be made, and the "Isle Royalty" will be given an opportunity to cooperate with this.

After one summer and winter of field work, we have gathered considerable information. Of course, no conclusions will be presented until the end of the study. Nevertheless, we do know that there is a pack of 15 wolves, a pack of three, and at least one lone wolf, totaling at least 19. The pack of 15 was followed for three weeks. In one day and night they traveled from the Daisy Farm to Washington Harbor. Although the moose count has not been completed at the time of this writing, there appears to be about the same number of moose as there was two years ago, when the last count was made.

Some information regarding the reaction of the 15 wolves to man was obtained when the investigator and pilot attempted to photograph them. Having followed the wolves along the Isle Royale shore toward Fisherman's Home, we quickly landed and hid in Sam Rude's fishhouse. Leaving the door open about six inches, we waited for the wolves to travel their trail about 50 feet in front of the cabin. In a few minutes they appeared, and we excitedly started photographing them — they weren't a bit camera shy. However, hearing our clicking cameras, the curious canines came cautiously toward us. Standing only a few feet from

us, the beautiful beasts looked like they could be petted. (We were too busy taking pictures to try.) After we had taken enough photos, we quickly opened the door and stood on the dock. The wolves turned tail and scrambled away. Yes, we sure were brave — with Sam Rude's fishhouse right behind us!

The people of Isle Royale are fortunate to be able to enjoy such an interesting biological entity as Isle Royale, and Purdue University is extremely fortunate to be able to study it.

WILDLIFE STUDY PROVIDES GOOD VIEW OF WINTER AT PARK

Going to Isle Royale for the winter leg of the wildlife study has given us the opportunity of seeing more of the Park during winter conditions. Arriving at Isle Royale on February 4th were Dave Mech of Purdue, pilots Jack Burgess and Art Tomes of Northeast Airways, Inc., Frank Taddeucci, and Bob Linn. Frank started the Windigo generator and returned to Minnesota with Art Tomes in the Cessna 180, leaving Dave, Jack and Bob together with the Aronca Champ at Windigo.

On the way to the island the lake between Minnesota and Washington Harbor was almost completely free from ice. Several days later, ice was all that could be seen and we concluded that ice came and went from one part of the lake to the other depending upon winds. The harbors, channels and bays of the island, however, are completely frozen over — even Siskiwit Bay which is relatively exposed.

After the first week of the study pilot Jack Burgess returned to Minnesota and was replaced by Don Murray who stayed until March 4. On March 4, the third pilot, Lee Schwartz replaced Don Murray and Dave Stimson replaced Bob Linn. At the present time, and considering the present warming weather trend, this winter's study will come to a close about March 15th when all personnel will return to the mainland.

The snowfall at the island this winter seems to have been less than in the Houghton area. In fact, the entire month of February was remarkably snowless at the island with only about 2 feet remaining from previous snows.

Air view of Camp Siskiwit and a part of Siskiwit Bay.



The Stimson residence at Windigo is where the party has been staying this winter. A TV set borrowed from the Pizzi residence helped pass the long winter evenings -- guns blazing on the western plains! Canada jays, downy woodpeckers, red squirrels and one red fox were common around the cabin.

find it pretty rough going in the deeper snow further in from shore. Here is a group of four photographed from the airplane just southwest from Fisherman's Home.



The Aronca Champ equipped with skis was kept next to the dock at Windigo where it was fairly well protected from high winds from the southwest. The plane was securely tied down each night because a high wind could easily turn it over. The "Champ" is shown here as it prepares to take off for the day's observations.

NOTES OF THE ISLE ROYALTY

A daughter, Sharon Roi, was born to Roy and Suzy Stamey on Tuesday, February 10th, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Hancock. Congratulations Roy, Suzy, and Sharon!

John and Blanche Markham returned from Florida and points South along about February 1.

The Muehlenhaupt's left for Colonial National Historical Park on February 12th. We understand that they had to wait quite awhile for their furniture to arrive, but that they are comfortably settled now. We also understand that the climate at this time of year is a remarkable improvement over the Upper Peninsula.

Louise Fretter was on annual leave for two weeks, returning home on March 7th. Only trouble is that a cold (or flu) came back with her.

Superintendent John Lewis returned on March 9th from Philadelphia, Washington, Miami, Havana and Mammoth Cave. Wow!

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* Many, many thanks to all our friends who have sent *
* gifts for Sharon and lent a helping hand since her *
* birth. *
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---Suzy and Roy Stamey



Isle Royale Natural History Association

The Wolf's Eye Press

Isle Royale National Park, Houghton, Michigan