



# Red Wolf News

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## **Wild red wolf population in Northeastern North Carolina**

- ? Red wolf population is estimated at 100, 72 of which are radio collared. Twenty-one sterilized hybrids and coyotes are also radio collared and hold space.
- ? Red wolves range over about 1.5 million acres of public and private land.

## **Red Wolf News Long Overdue**

*Two years have passed since the last edition of Red Wolf News. Since then, many faces have changed but the dedication to red wolf recovery remains strong. Jennifer Gilbreath, who once handled red wolf outreach and education left in 2000, and her presence has been truly missed. That same year, Biological Technician Leslie Schutte came on board, and with the help of Biologist Chris Lucash and many hard working telemetry interns, they began an extensive mobile ground telemetry program for the monitoring of red wolf movements. In 2001, Bud Fazio became the new Team Leader for the Red Wolf Recovery Program, and this year, Shauna Baron has joined the team to handle our long overdue outreach needs.*

## **Adaptive Management Plan: Update 2002**

Interbreeding (hybridization) between red wolves and coyotes is a threat to the survival of the highly endangered red wolf. In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partnered with a variety of scientific experts to conduct research and design an Adaptive Management Plan to better understand the hybridization phenomenon. Original estimates showed that if hybridization was not controlled, the red wolf would be unrecognizable as a separate species within as few as 3-6 generations (12 to 14 years).

Today, the Red Wolf Recovery Program field team is demonstrating that interbreeding can be managed successfully. By early 2001, the field team has been successful in creating a coyote and hybrid free zone, known as Zone 1 of the red wolf experimental population area. Any known hybrids in Zone 2 are sterile and the frequency of hybrid occurrence in Zone 3 is reduced. These sterile animals hold territorial space until a wolf can take it's place. Only three hybrid litters were found in 2001, and these litters were located on the western edge of Zone 3 where interface with coyotes is expected. In contrast, only one hybrid litter was found this year, and this litter was also located at the edge of Zone 3.

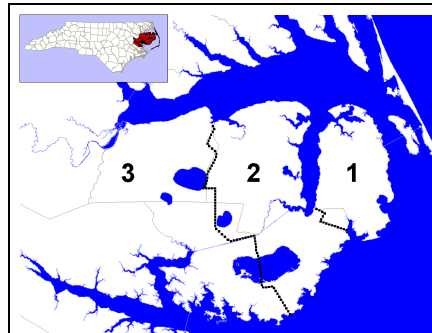
Due to success in implementing the Red Wolf Adaptive Management Plan, the boundaries of Zones 1 and 2 are being expanded to reflect the successful expansion of the coyote and hybrid free zone.

In order to establish a healthy and viable population of red wolves, the wolves must be able to defend their territories against other non-wolf canids. Recent observations suggest that red wolves are beginning to displace coyotes and hybrids out of their territories, though confirmation of displacement by red wolves will require further investigation.

The red wolf field team has extraordinary plans for 2002. One effort will focus on removing sterile hybrids from Zone 2. This will allow red wolves to acquire those territories through natural migration or by the insertion of red wolves into those areas by the field team.

Red wolves from the captive breeding program will also be released or inserted into the wild, including fostering captive born pups into wild red wolf litters. These methods allow for a unique way to augment the wild red wolf population, increase genetic diversity and enhance the overall survival of wild red wolves.

The Red Wolf Recovery Program continues to make great strides in building the world's only wild red wolf population. Cutting edge work in genetics helps us to understand and manage red wolves better with each passing year, and techniques such as fostering show new hope for achieving milestones in red wolf recovery. The Red Wolf Recovery Program has come a long way in thirty years, and we look forward to even greater success in the future.



Original Management zones of the red wolf experimental population area, Northeastern North Carolina

## 2002 Denning Season

Springtime in North Carolina is always exciting, bringing with it the arrival of new red wolf puppies. This spring, 9 red wolf litters have been confirmed with 40 puppies being produced.

In May, the red wolf field team implemented the first fostering of captive born red wolf puppies from a zoo into a wild red wolf litter.

The North Carolina Zoological Park donated two pups, a male and a female, from a litter of six born at the zoo. The pups were implanted with microchips for future identification and were transported to northeastern North Carolina.

The captive pups were then fostered into a wild wolf den containing two pups of identical age. Last year, this adult female raised six pups and we feel she can easily handle a litter of four.



*Red Wolf Puppies: USFWS*

The female has accepted the captive born pups as her own and all appear to be doing well. The female is being monitored from a distance using radio telemetry and so far she has been attending the den regularly.

Confirmation of the survival of these pups will not come until the Fall when the pups will be large enough to be captured and fitted with a radio collar.

Fostering has been successful among captive wolves and has positive implications for the wild red wolf recovery effort. If successful, the ability to foster captive born pups into the wild enables the USFWS to further enhance genetic diversity and overall survival of the wild red wolf population.

*Our special thanks to the North Carolina Zoological Park for their dedication to the red wolf recovery effort.*

### The captive breeding program: *By Will Waddell, Red Wolf Captive Breeding Program Coordinator.*

Thirty-three Red Wolf Species Survival Plan (RWSSP) cooperators in 20 states now participate in the national breeding program and manage a population of 147 red wolves.

Recently the RWSSP approved a three-year action plan establishing several key areas of focus, including four action items:

1) Continue to develop assisted reproductive technologies (semen

banking, fecal hormone profiles, artificial insemination) as part of a long-term strategy for red wolf captive-rearing.

2) Initiate a study to characterize behavior, husbandry and environmental factors in the context of captive reproductive success.

3) Investigate safe, effective and reversible methods of contraception as a population management tool.

4) Increase the number of participants in the RWSSP.

Providing accurate information and educating visitors about the red wolf and the recovery program was also acknowledged as a core action item where the RWSSP can have a positive impact.

Red wolves managed in the captive breeding program provide a safety net to their wild counterparts. The RWSSP continues to serve a vital role in the recovery program and is committed to our long standing partnership with the FWS in efforts to restore red wolves.

### The passing of an old friend: Wolf 331M

Wolf 331M, the last of the original captive born adult red wolves released at the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, passed away in October of 2001. Life in the wild can be hard work, especially for captive born animals, but wolf 331M outlived his captive born peers, reaching the astonishing age of 13 years old.

He was born at the Bull's Island captive breeding facility on April 21, 1988. He was released into Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge on January 18, 1989, quickly learning to secure food and take care of himself. For twelve years he led a healthy normal life in the wild.

Last fall the red wolf field team received a report of an old wolf sitting by the side of the road. The onset of old age had caused 331M to become disoriented and he was brought back into captivity. His condition continued to deteriorate and the field team made the decision to euthanize him to alleviate his suffering.

His contribution to the wild population and his will to survive will not soon be forgotten. In twelve years he sired more than twenty red wolf pups and his heritage now stretches through four generations. With the arrival of this year's puppies, his memory lives on as his new grandchildren take their place in the wild red wolf population.

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