

## Wolf sightings common on Harrison Flats



Jacob Martin, 8, his brother Samuel, 6, and their dad, Mark, stand in Garnet Road a ? mile from their home where they saw a wolf at midday several weeks ago. - Ralph Bartholdt

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Kevin McHail saw the wolf awash in the light of a flood lamp.

He woke around 10 p.m. because his children said there were wolves outside the family's O'Gara Road home.

His son, Patrick, back from college, had the light and caught a gray wolf in its beam.

"It is one of those 15 million candle power lights, almost shoulder mounted," said Mr. McHail, a Potlatch forester. "It was clear as day that we had one wolf that was not black. This one was more grayish."

He makes the distinction because neighbors on the Harrison Flats have for years reported sightings of a jet black wolf.

They call it a lone wolf and James Whipple who lives at Holiday Acres along Indian Mountain has a picture that he took from his home of the wolf in his yard.

The country around Indian Mountain is part of the Harrison Flats, a broad lumpy, pancake-type plateau that isn't exactly wild land.

It more closely resembles a rural residential area fringed with forests and dotted with homes. Long rectangles of land are cut by roads with names like Gem and Sunrise.

People farm this high peninsula bordered by steep hillsides that tumble into Lake Coeur d'Alene to the west and north, and Chatcolet, Round and Black lakes to the south and east.

State Highway 97, a scenic route that connects Harrison with I-90 bisects the Flats, and a jagged spine of hills, which include Grassy Mountain and Round Top, lead like a pan handle from here southeast into the St. Joe forest.

That is probably the route the wolves used to access the deer-rich Harrison Flats and its farms and ranchettes, neighbors surmise.

Harold Wadley, a former district ranger who keeps horses at his home a half-mile from the Whipples, has had dealings with the black wolf and others.

"There are five of them up here," he said.

He used to kick his horses out into his surrounding property, but keeps closer tabs on them since the time several years ago when he watched two wolves chase a white-tailed doe through his woodlot.

One of the wolves, a big gray, was "half a heartbeat behind the doe," he said.

The deer was "leaping like an impala," he said. "They hardly ever do that unless they are scared to death."

The wolves jumped over the county road, plowing through a fresh snow bank on the other side.

When he walked up to look at the tracks a neighbor stopped by with a Labrador retriever, he said.

The dog walked onto the snow bank without breaking through.

"Those wolves plowed a hole in it," he said.

Less than mile up Garnet Road from the Wadleys, Mark Martin and his 8-year-old son Jacob were horn hunting a couple months ago. They separated for an hour or more.

When Mark returned to the pickup his son was there waiting, he said. The next day they drove down the same road at midday and came face to face with the black wolf.

The boy knew it was nothing like the coyotes that yip and howl around the property at night.

And he knew it wasn't a dog that stared at the boy and the man who sat in the cab of the pickup.

"Dad, what's that?" His son asked in a low, heart-stopping tone.

"I told him, 'That's a wolf,'" Mr. Martin said.

He said his son and siblings wouldn't leave the yard for a couple weeks after the sighting.

"It kind of freaked him out a little bit," he said.

Wolf sightings in northern Idaho have become so common that the Idaho Department of Fish and Game no longer scrutinizes claims from people who report seeing wolves.

A federal rule removing wolves from endangered species status was adopted last week. That means Idaho Fish and Game could implement a hunting season this fall as part of the state's wolf management plan.

Wolf advocate groups oppose the idea. The fear of wolves by people is unfounded, they say, despite a 2005 case where a man was killed and eaten by wolves at a Saskatchewan mining camp. The incident was documented by University of Calgary biology professor Valerius Geist.

"Any time a wolf that appears tame looks you over, the only reason he is looking you over is because you're a potential lunch," Dr. Geist told the CanWest News Service.

Wolves living near humans follow a pattern of behavior that begins with losing fear of people. They begin watching people from a distance, he said.

The acclimation includes attacking livestock near farms and ranches and eventually killing pets, which may be chased onto decks and verandas.

With the lack of fear, he said, an attack on a person is not far off.

Mr. Whipple is of the Geist school. He thinks a hunting season on wolves will keep the animals away from humans and lessen the danger of a wolf versus human -- especially a child -- encounter.

"I took that picture of the wolf right where my 8-year-old sleds," he said.

He photographed the lone wolf from his deck, he said. When it saw him it ran away.

"If it were a pack I'd be more concerned," he said. "Generally they have plenty of food up here with all the deer and elk and turkeys."

A hunting season on wolves would likely make the animals wary of humans, said Mr. Martin, who thinks the wolves on the Harrison Flats are becoming brazen.

"They need to manage them so they are a little more afraid of us," he said.

His boys used to play at a pond a quarter-mile from his home, but he doesn't let them go there by themselves anymore.

The wolf that he and the boys saw that day in the pickup chilled him a little.

"I got a real good look at it," he said. "I didn't realize they were that big. It was bigger than a large dog. Way bigger."