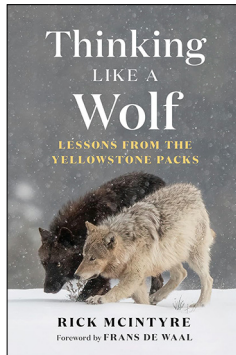


Thinking Like a Wolf: Lessons from the Yellowstone Packs

By Rick McIntyre. Foreword by Frans de Waal. 2024. Greystone Books. 272 pages, 34.95 CAD, Hardcover.

Thinking Like a Wolf, the fifth book in McIntyre's Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series, is a fascinating account that brings readers closer to the present-day in the lives of the Yellowstone wolves. With this newest manuscript, the series has now documented the first 29 years of wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone (from 1995 to 2023). The latest book focusses mostly on the Lamar Canyon and Junction Butte Packs, two social groups that McIntyre has observed for more than a decade. *Thinking Like a Wolf* is a captivating read that highlights nature, wolves and other carnivores, wildlife, and national parks—especially Yellowstone. As with his previous books, McIntyre provides an extraordinary level of comprehensive information on wild Gray Wolves (*Canis lupus*). I was just as mesmerized reading the stories of these wolves as I was reading his other four books (Way 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022a).

I am most impressed by McIntyre's storytelling abilities and how he balances accurate depictions of wolf pack activity with the feats and tribulations of individual wolves. This book overlaps with *The Alpha Female Wolf* (Greystone Books), the fourth book in the series that focusses on 06 Female, or 06, and ends in 2015. *Thinking Like a Wolf* starts with some background information on the Lamar Canyon Pack from 2010 to 2012 to get the reader up to speed. It then details events in the park between 2012 and 2023, with the last sections of the book focusing on the Junction Butte wolves. The initial chapters follow members of the Lamar Canyon Pack—including 06's mate, 755, and one of her daughters, 926—after 06's death in late 2012. McIntyre has a particular appreciation and respect for 926, whom he dreams about nightly while recovering from open heart surgery in a hospital room in Billings, Montana (Chapter 1). He is so affected by 926 that by the end of the book, in a show of respect for her, he returns some of her blood—which he collected from the site where she was shot and killed at the age of 7.5 years near McIntyre's residence (pp. 69–70)—to the 'Den Woods' where she had multiple litters (pp. 210, 214). McIntyre says that he still thinks about 926 and the Lamar Canyon Pack nearly every day (p. 211). The motto he took away from this family was that you do not judge someone by how many times they get



knocked down, but rather by how many times they get back up (p. 212).

As McIntyre follows 755, 926, and the rest of the Lamar Canyon Pack, he notes that resilience is a key character trait of these wolves (pp. 22, 46, 68). No matter what life throws at them, no matter how many packmates they lose, they always persevere. The Junction Butte wolves have a similar will to survive (e.g., p. 205). Wolf 907F of the Junction Butte Pack is almost 10-years-old at the end of the book and was alpha female of the pack three different times (at the time of this writing in September 2024, she was 11.5 years old and still alive). As I read *Thinking Like a Wolf*, I thought about the 9000-plus days that McIntyre has spent in Yellowstone studying and watching wolves (p. 183). I venture to guess that his collection of books and personal experiences offer more detail on a given species than anyone else's in history. Yes, in history!

Throughout the book, McIntyre depicts wolves as caring, family-oriented animals that have a level of cooperation similar to humans (p. 204). They have a theory of mind regarding other wolves as thinking, rational beings (pp. 141–143). McIntyre writes about the individual personalities of these wolves and how some, like Junction Butte's 907F, are successful by cooperating with pack mates and forming alliances to overtake other wolves (see Chapters 11 and 12). Despite the popular belief that males are dominant (which is debunked in *The Alpha Female Wolf*), McIntyre describes how wolves live in matriarchal societies (pp. 75, 116). Females make many of the major decisions for their families.

The part of McIntyre's books that I enjoy most are the stories, but with so many anecdotes over 29 years, his observations have become hard data revealing much about these creatures. In detailed accounts based on hundreds of observations, McIntyre describes:

- how and when wolves mate (p. 77);
- how Junction Butte wolf 911M, despite having three bad legs, brought down a cow Elk by himself (pp. 99–101) and then fought to his death eight wolves from the Prospect Peak Pack—it was the most courageous thing McIntyre had ever seen (p. 105);
- that males never break up female fights (p. 121);
- the 10-plus layers of clothing that he wears in the winter to stay warm compared to wolves' fur coats allowing them to survive even in sub-zero temperatures (p. 122); and
- how Elk populations have significantly increased in the three-state region that surrounds Yellowstone

(i.e., Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming) since wolves returned to the region in 1995 (p. 148).

I wrote a picture e-book after observing the Junction Butte wolves for a couple of weeks during the 2021 summer (Way 2022b), so I was especially interested in McIntyre's observations of that pack. They are a remarkably effective social unit, living in a group that is double the average size for packs in Yellowstone, which already contains some of the biggest documented groups. McIntyre observed 35 wolves in the Junction Butte Pack one winter, including 18 surviving pups being raised cooperatively by multiple females (pp. 152, 158–159). He also saw 55 wolves from one spot in a day, including 29 Junctions (pp. 157–158), and 32 wolves at a summertime rendezvous site in August 2021 (p. 168). He watched one Grizzly Bear (aka Friend Bear) bed down with 27 Junction wolves in September 2021, as if the bear was part of the pack (p. 170). Friend Bear continued to follow and feed with the wolves for a couple of months until mid-November when he likely went into hibernation (p. 172). McIntyre describes Friend Bear as a Hulk-sized bouncer compared to the wolves (p. 170).

McIntyre's descriptions are tangible and make you feel like you are there in the park with him. Given all the wolves involved in the story, I am continually impressed with his ability to weave facts with narrative. The Alpha Wolves of Yellowstone series provides unprecedented levels of detail on pack dynamics and interactions among individuals. I only note some of these accounts in this review, so reading the book is a requirement for anyone interested in wolves and wildness. This series has been a joy to read. McIntyre has expanded upon his comprehensive field notes to offer powerful insights and perspectives into the amazing

wolf behaviours that he has witnessed over his career. In the past 6.5 years, despite being officially retired, he went into the park nearly every day (although he occasionally leaves Yellowstone to lecture on wolves and his books), and then worked on his books after completing his daily field work (pp. 67, 120). As I've stated in previous reviews (Way 2022a), these books are one-of-a-kind, and McIntyre's attention to investigating a particular species in the wild is unlikely to be replicated again.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT: McIntyre's four other earlier books in his "Yellowstone series" are noted as being popular accounts enlightening the public's interest about Yellowstone wolves in the following article in this same issue of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*:

Mech, L.D. 2024. Plural breeding in Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) packs: how often? *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 138(1): 58–62. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v138i1.3271>