



International Wolf Center

# Ethogram

Ely, Minnesota, USA  
Teaching the World about Wolves  
www.wolf.org



## The Gone But Not Forgotten Pack: Lakota, MacKenzie, Lucas, Nyssa, and Kiana

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### Lakota 4/28/93-11/7/08

Lakota was born on April 28, 1993, at Bear Country, USA, near Rapid City, South Dakota. She represented the great plains subspecies of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus nubilus*) and was noted for her role as the omega or lowest ranking pack member. She maintained this pack status throughout her entire life. Being lowest ranking, didn't mean she was down and out; she served an important role at the bottom of the pack rank. She was often the instigator of dominance chases, with the pack close on her tail. She was dispersed into retirement in 2002, along with her littermates, MacKenzie and Lucas and continued to instigate chases, although a bit slower as she aged. At 15 1/2 years of age, her system started to show signs of decline and Lakota was euthanized on November 7, 2008.

The behavioral traits of an omega wolf can be more pronounced than higher ranking pack members, specifically passive submission. It is critical that lower ranking wolves pay homage to the dominant members, greeting with a low tail, flat ears and a body posture quick to roll on their backs for the dominant wolf. Lakota did these behaviors well, and her respect for the dominant pack members helped maintain pack cohesiveness. She was also an efficient excavator creating most of the den holes in the enclosures. Lakota primarily dug the area for the new pond, added to the Retired Enclosure; the staff just shaped it as a pond.

Lakota outlived all of her littermates. During her last six months of life she had a unique management situation as a lone pack member. Wolf Care staff developed new management strategies to ensure that Lakota's physical and behavioral needs were met. These strategies included: fence placement and walkway that allowed Lakota access to the wolf yard and lab, specialized diets, staff visitations and enclosure improvements.

The access to the wolf lab was most significant. She became acclimated to the indoor kennel, which would later prove important for veterinary care. Having Lakota in the wolf lab did create management issues. She became quite fond of taking items from the lab and running back into the Retired enclosure. Her list of larceny items included pillows, backpacks, water bottles, bags of dog toys, sweatshirts, pizzas, a block of cheese, a compass, a stuffed moose and a bag of grass seed, just to name a few. Her role as the instigator of chases did not diminish as the sole pack member, now, it was the Wolf Care staff chasing her.

Lakota was the instigator of many things, and taught us that the bottom of the rank order is just as important as the top. While it is sad to lose such an important part of our Wolf Care program, it is comforting to know that Lakota had a great life and was vital part of our educational mission.



8/11/2008



4/9/2008



8/24/2008



3/13/2008



4/20/2007



5/26/1993



2/15/1995



6/14/2006



5/16/2006



3/5/2007



9/8/2006



7/24/2006



6/28/2006



4/3/97



1/2/2007



1/2/2006



6/29/2008



7/5/2008



9/8/2008



Spending time in the lab  
7/24/2008

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**MacKenzie: 4/28/93-5/21/08**

MacKenzie, was born on April 28, 1993, at Bear Country, USA, near Rapid City, South Dakota. She represented the great plains subspecies of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus nubilus*), and was noted for her striking black pelage and her intent ears pricked forward in an alert posture. MacKenzie was the dominant female in the Exhibit Pack until Shadow, one of the arctic pups supplanted her. She was dispersed into retirement and established the dominant female status with the retired pack until she died on May 21, 2008.

The behavioral traits of a dominant wolf can be much more intense than that of lower ranking pack members. Pack leadership includes not only defending the territory, but establishing strong social bonds to maintain pack cohesiveness. MacKenzie's dominance and nurturing qualities were observed during the August 9, 2000 wolf pup introduction. The behavior logs for that day read as follows:

*"Pups are choosing to sleep near MacKenzie (ranging from 6 inches to 5 feet distance) and*



9/8/1998

sometimes Lucas. Pups appear to run to Mackenzie when fearful or when being chased by Lakota and Lucas. Generally, when the pups are restless, Mackenzie whines and approaches the pups until they lay down, at which time, she circles them and then lies down in the same general area.

Several times during the observation shift, after MacKenzie demonstrated this behavior, Lucas attempted to approach and Mackenzie stood up flattened her ears and Lucas retreated. During one of the encounters, MacKenzie curled her lip and barred her teeth at Lucas, again he retreated rather than approaching the pups."

MacKenzie was the matriarch of this facility who taught us so much about wolf behavior, dignity, dominance status and retirement.



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### Lucas: 4/28/93 - 7/11/06

Lucas was born on April 28, 1993, at Bear Country, USA, near Rapid City, South Dakota. He represented the great plains subspecies of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus nubilus*), and was noted for his very calm personality, lack of strong dominance behavior and tall, striking appearance. For the first seven years of his life, he was the only male in a pack of females. Since rank order is gender-specific for wolves, Lucas, as the only male, became the dominant male by default. He was very laid back since he had no other male to challenge him. A laid back animal is easier to manage.

But Lucas tried hard to fill his dominant role, and he provided great behavioral data while doing it. Missing the challenge of another male, he created his own assertion of authority. Often ignored by the females, Lucas would display a stand over behavior to his littermates. In this situation, one wolf stands directly on top of another wolf that is lying down. In some cases, there may be other postures or eye contact, but in Lucas's case, he just stood there, and the females usually averted their gaze or just got up and left.

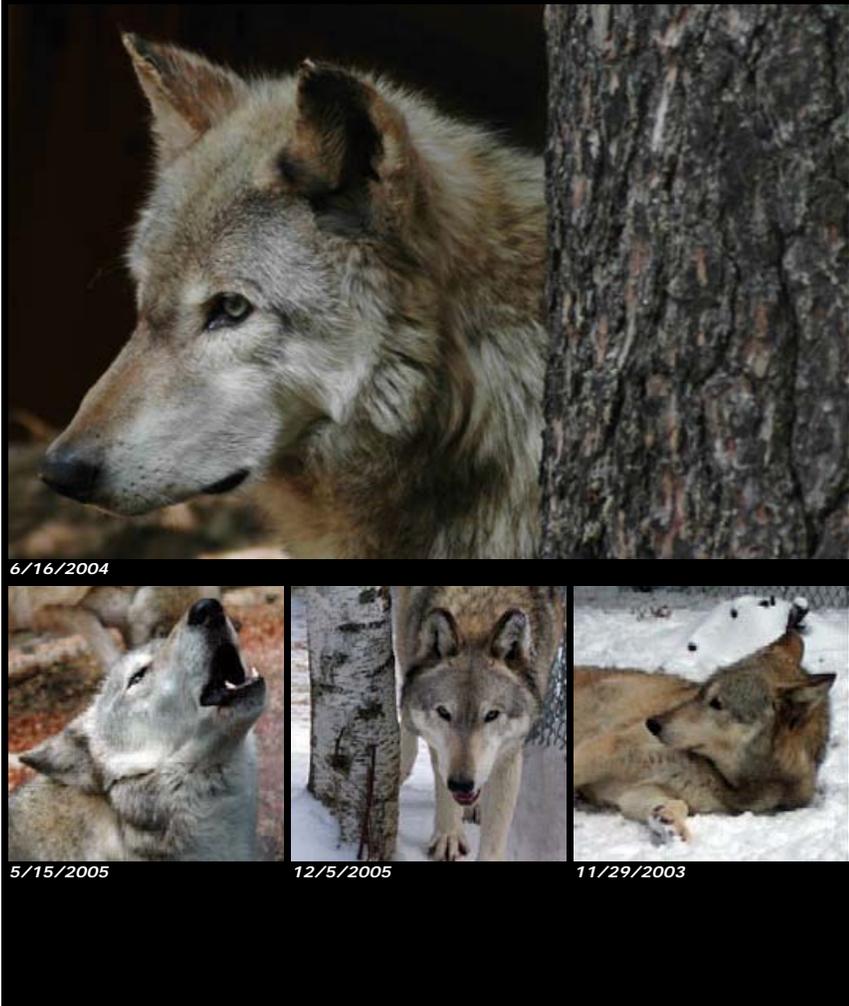
One of staff's best memories of Lucas is the way he exerted authority during feeding time. On numerous occasions, when a roadkill deer was placed in the wolf enclosure, Lucas would pick up the head, set it down in front of his packmates, and growl. He also stars in an infamous video clip demonstrating a foreleg stab, where he taunts young Shadow (four months old at the time) to leave his deer carcass and chase him.



[Watch Video](#)

On July 11, 2006, Lucas joined another pack at the Center: "The Gone But Not Forgotten" pack. He was euthanized when it was clear he would not recover from a chronic, degenerative spinal condition and age-related issues. Wolf Care staff members commented:

"He was a dignified animal. He always held his head up high," even as his legs gave out on the



Tuesday afternoon of his death. The staff strived to make the end of his 13-year life "as dignified as possible" and were with him until the end.



6/14/2006



2/1/2006



1/2/2006



5/10/2004



1/14/2005



2/5/1998



1/9/2006



4/10/2006

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**Nyssa: 5/12/04–5/11/05**

Nyssa was one of three pups acquired from the Minnesota Wildlife Connection in Sandstone, Minnesota in May, 2004. Nyssa was raised with two pups that were one week older, and not true littermates, but had a genetic tie. The two females that whelped the pups were siblings. All three pups were great plains subspecies of the gray wolf, (*Canis lupus nubilus*) although Nyssa was unique with a black pelage. Because Nyssa was a week younger, staff and volunteers were concerned Nyssa wouldn't be able to keep up with the older pups, but behavioral observations quickly dispelled that concern. Many hours of observation

demonstrated that spirit is not about size, it's about attitude and Nyssa had plenty of that.

The loss of this member of the Gone but Not Forgotten Pack is the most difficult for Wolf Care staff. All the others lived full lives, some longer than others, but all surpassed the average age of mortality for wild wolves. Nyssa was just a yearling at the time of her death.

Nyssa and Maya had been spayed and were kept separate from the rest of the pack to give the yearlings time to heal. It is difficult to assess how long to isolate an individual for surgical recovery. Wolves are social animals, and separation from the pack can lead to destructive behavior as they climb and chew fences to get back to each other. Alternately, the pack may perceive that the wolf separated for a medical procedure has dispersed, and can close ranks, becoming aggressive when the other returns. When the wolves became extremely agitated at the separation, the females were allowed back into the main enclosure with the rest of the pack and were put under a 24-hour watch by handlers. Five days after the surgery the incisions on the two females were healing well, with sutures still in place. The next morning Nyssa was found with her incision open. An exuberant run or a jump across the pond could have popped a stitch, causing bleeding and drawing her and the other wolves' attention to the suture site. The suture had only opened an inch, but her injuries were severe. On May 11, 2005, at one day less than a year of age, Nyssa was euthanized. We are reminded by an article on the Center's Web site at wolf.org that the second leading cause of wolf mortality is wolf-on-wolf aggression.



1/29/2005



3/12/2005



3/12/2005



3/1/2005



9/29/2004



7/18/2004



3/12/2005



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**Kiana: 4/28/93 - 12/26/98**

Kiana, was born on April 28, 1993 at Bear Country, USA, near Rapid City, South Dakota. She represented the great plains subspecies of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus nubilus*), and was noted for her intense eye stare and pronounced almond-shaped eyes. Kiana was a strong social pack member that had an intense bond with MacKenzie, the dominant female. She would willingly submit to MacKenzie without question, never challenging or showing any indication that she wanted to move up in rank.

Kiana was also noted for her heightened aggression toward Lakota. She more intensely dominated the omega wolf than did MacKenzie. Often, MacKenzie stood back observing Kiana pinning Lakota. When MacKenzie approached, Kiana submitted to her, rolling her head to the side, flattening her ears and licking MacKenzie's muzzle. Kiana was wary of strangers who came near the wolf yard and would retreat to the woods line to stare at them from between the branches.

On December 26, 1998, Center staff announced the death of Kiana, the second ranking female wolf of the Center's Exhibit Pack.

Visitors saw her acting normally before she appeared to have a seizure and lay down on a snowy path. Necropsy reports showed the possibility of a heart-related metabolic seizure to which she may have been genetically inclined.

In the weeks after Kiana's death, MacKenzie nearly lost her dominant status. She not only lost a strong social companion and seemed to display separation anxiety, she lost a major control on Lakota. Lakota became far more testy and pushed against MacKenzie's dominance.

About six weeks after Kiana's death, MacKenzie seemed to regain her social footing and stood up to Lakota's tests. The presence or absence of one wolf, such as Kiana, may affect the dynamics and cohesiveness of the pack—but in ways we cannot predict. Kiana will be remembered by the Wolf Care staff who knew her for her fierce loyalty to MacKenzie and for the wild and intense look of her wolfish eyes.



2/15/1995



12/18/1995

12/1/1994



1/12/1996

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