



Packing Up the Pack

An expansion is on the horizon for the Shy Wolf Sanctuary

WRITTEN BY ANN M. O'PHELAN

The Shy Wolf Sanctuary, Education, and Experience Center is home to about three dozen North American gray wolves (including wolfdogs, which are part wolf and part dog). Yet you

wouldn't know that as you walk through the front gates, or even as you walk along the meandering pathways right next to the pens where they reside.

The wolves are observant, introspective,

and incredibly quiet. In fact, the loudest sound I heard during most of my visit to the Naples-based sanctuary was the tapping of my feet as I walked along the pathway.

Then, out of nowhere, I heard a magical sound, that legendary howl we all associate with wolves. It was mesmerizing. I looked over at my guide, Nancy J. Smith, who also serves as president of the sanctuary. "You should record that sound," I said. "We have, many times," she responded with a smile.

Since 1993, Smith and her husband, Kent, have offered a home to exotic, stray, and injured animals. In 2001, they officially formed the Shy Wolf Sanctuary, a Florida nonprofit and 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.

The sanctuary is licensed and inspected by Collier County Domestic Animal Services, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the United States Department of Agriculture. Animals come there from shelters, after being seized by government agencies, following surrenders by owners, and for a number of other reasons.

Throughout the years, the Smiths have made numerous public appearances and conducted speaking engagements. They've also had many guests come to the sanctuary to meet the wolves, which all have their own personalities and temperaments.

Some wolves stay in the shadows of



Nancy J. Smith, president of Shy Wolf Sanctuary, interacts with residents Cree and Dancer (above). The wolves and wolfdogs at the sanctuary are observant and introspective (top).



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their pens, while others can interact with humans. This might be due to the fact that they are more accustomed to people, are simply friendlier to begin with, or have dogs in their bloodlines.

In addition to the wolves, the sanctuary provides a home for other animal residents, including a bobcat, two cougars, prairie dogs, and turtles. It also has a few adoptable wolfdogs and mixed-breed dogs.

Smith walked me through the sanctuary's presentation board, which explains the background stories of many of the wolves and tells about how they're doing now. One of the wolfdogs, Dancer, was rescued in Florida in 2009. She had been living with someone who did not know the

proper way to care for her and no longer wanted that responsibility. I was later honored to meet Dancer. She proved a very affectionate, lovable, gentle soul who offered plenty of kisses and now lives with her friend, Cree, in a private pen.

I also heard about and met Bear, another wolfdog who was just skin and bones when he first arrived at the sanctuary in 2006. He is now well-fed and loves a good scratch and belly rub or two.

The animals' rescue stories are sometimes hard to hear, as many of them came from harsh conditions. But the recoveries they've made once entering the sanctuary rank as nothing short of miraculous.

The Shy Wolf Sanctuary has plans to

Smith and her husband, Kent, have offered a home to exotic, stray, and injured animals like Dickens (top left) and Chatima (above) since 1993.

relocate to a larger den, if you will. At its current location, it can no longer offer visitation opportunities due to zoning regulations. (The current property is zoned as residential.) So the sanctuary has purchased twenty acres in the North Belle Meade area of Naples about six miles east of its current location, providing it with a much larger space than the two and a half acres it occupies now. Plans for bigger and better animal homes are in store at the new location, along with zoning that will allow visitors to experience and learn about the sanctuary and its residents.

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EXPLORER



The plans for the sanctuary's new site in North Belle Meade include larger and better enclosures for the animals with more natural enrichment (bottom right).

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—DEANNA DEPPEN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SHY WOLF SANCTUARY



HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Shy Wolf Sanctuary relies on donations from visitors and animal lovers. There are many ways for people to lend a hand.

Purchase one of the sanctuary's yearly calendars (\$10 donation).

Donate gift certificates for retailers such as Publix, Home Depot, and Lowe's.

Make a monetary donation to the sanctuary.

Volunteer your time.

Sponsor a part of the new facility, such as a building or enclosure.

Sponsor a resident of the sanctuary.

Deanna Deppen, vice president of the Shy Wolf Sanctuary. For right now, the sanctuary is focused on raising money through grants, donations, and other fund-raising efforts, so that the move to the new location can happen as soon as possible. Once the funds are secured, it may take a year to build the new site.

After construction is completed, the animals will have larger, better enclosures with more natural enrichment, such as waterfalls, streams, and ponds. Animals will rotate through different enclosures, in order to expose them to different smells and activities. This will allow guests to see how animals react when entering and exploring new territory. And in the event of a major weather situation, staffers will be able to lock the animals down in hurricane-proof buildings, which helps enhance community safety.

“The facility will also be designed to permit better data collection,” says Deppen. An educational classroom and learning center will help the sanctuary share what it has learned with others. Visitors will continue to be able to interact with those animals that desire it.

For several years, the members of Cub Scouts Pack 330 in San Carlos Park have visited the sanctuary on regular occasions and have assisted in numerous ways through donations of time and volunteer efforts. For Matthew Peterson, the pack's cubmaster, the Shy Wolf Sanctuary helps

teach the boys and others who visit about the bigger world around them.

“Visitors experience animals they would not normally see in their daily lives and are able to interact with them in ways few ever would,” says Peterson. “Shy Wolf provides the community with exposure to these animals and explains their major roles in the ‘circle of life.’ They help us understand wolves’ and other animals’ impact on our world, and what negative impacts could come to the world if these animals are not saved.”

For more information about the Shy Wolf Sanctuary, Education, and Experience Center, visit shywolfsanctuary.com or call 239-455-1698.

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