

WOLVERINE

October 2003

For the past month the WRA has orchestrated the care of a truly unique patient. From operation to final release a wolverine has focused attention on the importance of wildlife rehabilitation.

Wolverines are very secretive and elusive creatures. They are usually found in very remote locations and seldom, if ever, seen by humans. So it was a great surprise when one was found under a stationery vehicle in Port Moody and brought in to the WRA.

The young male wolverine, weighing 15.6 kilograms was in good body condition. However, he had a contracted tendon, likely as a result of an old wound, and was not using his right front leg.

Surgery was necessary and thanks to services donated by local experts the tendon was cut to allow for a greater range of movement. Dr. Mark Smith, lead surgeon, was assisted by Dr. Ken MacQuisten and Dr. Judith Siegert. Dr. Loic Legendre, dental specialist, removed several damaged premolars and completed a root canal on a canine.

The wolverine recovered swiftly and within a week was putting pressure on its leg. He was rehabilitated on November 10th near the Coquitlam Watershed which boasts a coastal ecosystem ideal for wolverines.

Janice Dickie says numerous individuals were involved in the release of the wolverine.

“We could not have provided the quality of care had it not have been for the assistance we received from so many people including the veterinarians who volunteered their time, individuals in the provincial government, in particular Jack Evans, Eric Lofroth and Helen Schwantje as well as Ken Juvik of the GVRD.”



Elusive Wolverine in Care at Wildlife Rescue

Date: 28th October, 2003

One of nature's most elusive and legendary carnivores is recovering in a Burnaby wildlife rehabilitation centre following an operation, believed to be a Canadian first, to correct a contracted biceps tendon.

A young male wolverine was found hiding under a stationery car in Port Moody. It took three SPCA officers to remove the animal and bring it in to the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC's (WRA) care centre on Burnaby Lake.

Liz Thunstrom, Chair of the WRA Animal Care Committee and President of the Wildlife Rehabilitators Network of BC, says the wolverine was likely looking for a safe place to hide as they are seldom, if ever, found in built up areas.

"Wolverines are very rarely seen by humans. They spend their lives in remote wooded areas and are very secretive."

Thunstrom says the wolverine has a well-deserved reputation as a tough character. This bulky carnivore, that looks like a cross between a bear and badger, can bring down much larger animals such as caribou. Wolverines have also been reported to fight off wolves and mountain lions for their carrion.

Attending veterinarian, Ken MacQuisten, identified that the wolverine had a contracted biceps tendon in its right leg, likely as a result of an old wound. Although it weighed a healthy 15.6 kilograms and was coping well the wolverine did not put pressure on its right foot.

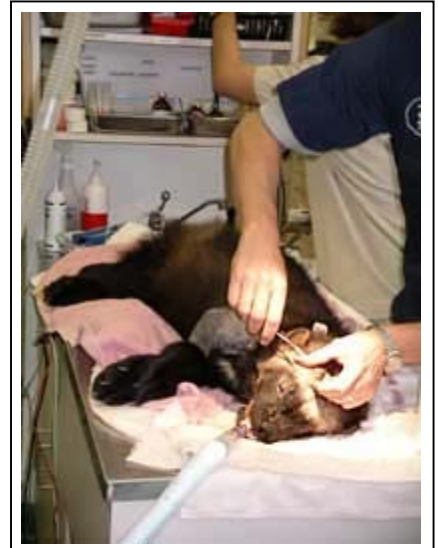
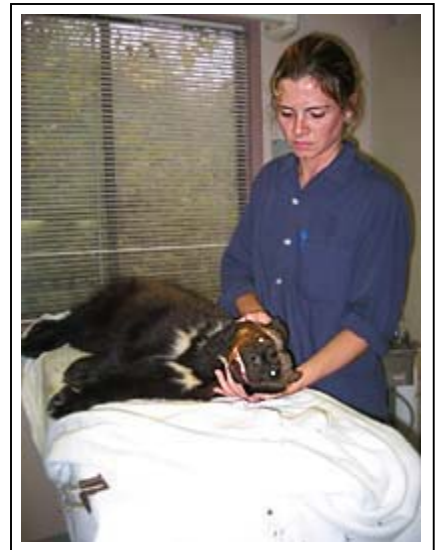
After consultation with local veterinarians and the Province of British Columbia the WRA opted to go ahead with the surgery on the right leg.

Liz Thunstrom explains: "The wolverine is blue listed or "vulnerable" in this province with between 3,000 and 4,000 animals. In eastern Canada it is endangered with less than 50 animals surviving.

"With such low numbers it is important to ensure this animal gets back into the wild and breeds. This animal may have coped as it was, but it will be far more successful if it can use both front paws."

Highly regarded veterinarian surgeon, Dr. Mark Smith, volunteered his services for the procedure and was assisted by Dr. Ken MacQuisten and Dr. Judith Seigert.

In addition to releasing the contracted tendon the wolverine also had some dental work. Dental specialist, Dr. Loic Legendre, removed some damaged premolars and did a root canal on a damaged canine. A microchip was also implanted in the wolverine and some DNA samples taken.



Recovery time is expected to be approximately two weeks. The animal will be released to a remote, coastal watershed location. The WRA is currently reviewing release sites in conjunction with Eric Lofroth, Ecosystem Specialist with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

Facts about Wolverines

1. The Wolverine is very secretive preferring to live in the back country and is rarely seen. It inhabits boreal, montane, sub alpine and arctic tundra regions, generally preferring higher elevations. In some areas its range has been significantly reduced presumably because of human expansion.
2. Wolverines are members of the family Mustelids. This group includes weasels and skunks.
3. Wolverines are solitary except for mating and have large home ranges.
4. Wolverines are powerfully built and well suited to winter survival. They walk on the soles of their large feet like bears allowing them to move more easily through soft, deep snow.
5. The Wolverine has a powerful jaw capable of feeding on frozen meat and bone.
6. Wolverines will eat anything from small eggs to full-sized deer. Their diet is primarily carrion. However they are capable of bringing down prey five times their size. Although primarily carnivores Wolverines will also eat berries and on occasion insects for protein.
7. Its head is broad and rounded with small eyes and short round ears.
8. Males are typically larger than females weighing 11 to 18 kilograms; females weigh six to 12 kilograms.
9. Fur is thick, glossy and dark brown. Some individuals have a silvery facial mask and a pale buff stripe running from shoulder to rump and crossing the rump just above the long, bushy tail.
10. Wolverines communicate with vocalizations and scent-making. Like the skunk they have well developed musk glands.
11. Wolverines give birth on average every two years to a litter of between two and five kits. Kit survival is low and as a result kit production is often less than one kit per adult female a year.
12. The solitary wolverines will come together to mate between May and August, with pairing lasting only a few days. Ovulation is thought to be induced by copulation. The embryo is implanted six months later and gestation takes 30 to 50 days. The kits are born between January and April.
13. The young are born with white fur and weigh around 84 grams. They nurse for 8-10 weeks and may remain with their mother for up to two years.
14. Wolverines den in a variety of structures. In BC they locate their dens under the snow associated with large rocks and downed logs at mid to high elevations. In Tundra environments they build elaborate dens often tunnelling 50 metres or more into the snow.
15. Latest research indicates there are between 3,000 and 4,000 wolverines in British Columbia.



For additional information: www.wolverinefoundation.org
Eric Lofroth, Ministry of Water, Land and Air lofroth@gems5.gov.bc.ca

Wolverine heads out to wilds

Date: 10th November, 2003

A young male wolverine was successfully released back into the wild November 10th after several weeks recuperating from an operation in the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC's rehabilitation centre.

The wolverine, found hiding under a stationery car in Port Moody, had a contracted tendon which caused it to limp.

Ken Macquisten, attending veterinarian, and local veterinarians from the Animal Critical Care Group volunteered their services to make the operation possible and numerous individuals were involved in finding resources and assisting the WRA in its decision making.

The wolverine was sedated and examined at the Wildlife Rescue Association before it was returned to the wild. Macquisten was happy to see that the leg incision site had healed perfectly.

The wolverine was released just outside the boundary of the Coquitlam Watershed. Three deer carcasses and several dead birds were also left as short-term food sources for the recovering wolverine.

Janice Dickie, WRA executive director, says that the suspense was palpable as Jackie Ward, Animal Care Team Leader, opened the cage door and the wolverine poked its head out for the first time. Smiles and silent cheers were everywhere among the team as the wolverine dashed from the cage and used the previously injured leg as he ran into the forest. "This is the moment we have been anticipating for weeks," said Dickie. "This is the heart of what wildlife rehabilitation is all about."

The wolverine has a well-deserved reputation as a tough character. This bulky carnivore that looks like a cross between a bear and badger can bring down much larger animals such as caribou. Wolverines have also been reported to fight off wolves and mountain lions for their carrion.

The wolverine is blue listed or "vulnerable" in this province with between 2,000 and 4,000 animals. In eastern Canada it is endangered with less than 50 surviving animals.

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC, a not-for-profit wildlife rehabilitation society located next to Burnaby Lake at 5216 Glencarin Drive. If you find an animal in distress or are interested in volunteering call 526-7275 or visit their website at www.wildliferescue.ca.

Sad conclusion to Wolverine's journey

Date: 10th June, 2004

The long journey of a young male wolverine that was successfully rehabilitated at the WRA Wildlife Rescue Association of BC in November 2003 came to a sad conclusion in early June 2004.

The wolverine had been successfully released back into the wild on November 10th after several weeks recuperating from an operation in WRA's rehabilitation centre.

The wolverine, originally found hiding under a stationary car in Port Moody, had a fractured canine tooth and a contracted tendon that caused it to limp. The young male was eventually caught by three staff members from the SPCA who brought the 15.6kg (34lb) animal to the Wildlife Rescue Association on Burnaby Lake.

Ken Macquisten, attending veterinarian, and local veterinarians from the Animal Critical Care Group volunteered their services to make the operation possible and numerous individuals were involved in finding resources and assisting the WRA in its decision making.

On the day of the release, the wolverine was sedated and examined at the Wildlife Rescue Association before it was returned to the wild. Macquisten was happy to see that the leg incision site had healed perfectly. The wolverine was released north of the Coquitlam Watershed.

On June 2nd, 2003, a dead wolverine was discovered on a beach at Port Moody Inlet near Mossom Creek (just east of loco Townsite). The SPCA delivered the animal to Wildlife Rescue's rehabilitation centre in Burnaby where it was quickly determined that this was the same wolverine. The young male had shorter fur on the leg that had been surgically repaired and a broken tooth that revealed evidence of a former root canal.

Wildlife rehabilitators at WRA examined the wolverine and observed claw wounds on the neck and large bite marks penetrating the skull. The wounds were likely sustained in an attack by a larger predator such as a cougar.

Provincial wildlife veterinarian Helen Schwantje in Victoria is to perform an autopsy to determine the cause of death. The wolverine had been in the water prior to its death.

Janice Dickie, WRA Executive Director, states that despite the wolverine's unfortunate end, the case is considered a success in rehabilitation terms because the wolverine survived for a whole season in the wild. "Male wolverines are top predators that face a tough life in the wild. It is not unusual for a wolverine's life to end in this way," she says. However, it was surprising that the wolverine chose to return to Port Moody after its short stay in captivity and encounters with so many humans.

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