

A black and white photograph of a wolf standing on a snow-covered rock in a forest. The wolf is facing left, looking towards the camera. The background shows evergreen trees and a snowy landscape.

In late winter 2009, the hormone-driven howls of '06 rang through the valleys.

Wolf '06 of Lamar Canyon

Roy Laible

A black and white photograph of a snowy forest landscape. The ground is covered in snow, and there are evergreen trees in the background.

by LAURIE LYMAN

Yellowstone National Park is a paradise for wolf watchers like me, so after I retired from teaching, my husband and I bought a house just outside the park, close to the fabled Lamar Valley. We now spend most of our time there, and it's a rare day we're not out, no matter what the weather. Aided by our spotting scopes, we can step into the lives of wild wolves, getting to know specific wolves, their personalities and their relationships to other wolves.

The year 2010 may be remembered for many things, but for us avid wolf watchers, it was the year of the '06 female. A granddaughter of the legendary 21M and 42F of the famous Druid Peak pack, she was born to the Agate Creek pack in the spring of '06—thus her unofficial name.

A New Breeding Female

We first noticed the '06 female in the fall of 2008 as her natal pack broke up, leaving her to survive on her own or perhaps to find a mate. When the 2008 breeding season began, the surrounding valleys reverberated with her howls as she begged for attention. She definitely attracted the opposite sex, and we spent days watching the males fight over her. However, although we observed '06 with five different males, she didn't find a partner or produce any known pups.

In late winter of 2009, her hormone-driven howls rang again through the valleys, this time reaching the ears of wolf 755M, a black male spending time with five females from the legendary Druid Peak pack. Ravaged and weak from mange, these females chased '06

off, but they couldn't persuade 755M to stay with them. She kept him in her sight, even bedding one time on the yellow line in the middle of the Lamar Valley Road so she could keep track of him and the females. The drama increased when 755M was joined by his brother, 754M. We observed '06 in close encounters with both, and the wolves became a threesome. Wolf '06 had won two males, her status as a breeder and her own territory in the Lamar Valley at last!

With the birth of four pups in late April 2010, the Lamar Canyon pack was officially established. Those of us lucky enough to watch this wolf family knew the coming summer would make any wolf biologist envious. Maturing into a strong leader, a mighty hunter and provider and the good mother of four rambunctious pups, '06 ran the outfit. Hardly a day passed without a memorable story. My close comrades and I invite you to share three '06 adventures from our daily field journals.

Bear Problems

*(May 9, 2010 —
pups 2 weeks old)*

About 9:30 a.m., another wolf watcher called me on his field radio saying a grizzly sow and two yearling cubs were in the den area—and '06 was attacking a cub! When the bear approached the den, '06 torpedoed out of the entrance, right into the cub. The bear and the wolf rolled head over heels down the hill. "'06 was fully extended and looked like she was flying," reported the observer, adding he had never seen anything like it. Mama bear hurried to defend her baby, gently licking it after its scare.

The wolf and all three bears moved to the area below the den, and for hours, the chase and standoff continued with '06 barking continuously in a high-pitched tone. Running back and forth, she lunged at the bears to get them to chase her. After leading them far to the left of the den, she suddenly

cocked her head, apparently hearing something above her. With her concentration off the bears, they took the opportunity to attempt escape, but their route went back toward the den. She was oblivious. She had found something she needed to roll in—probably bear scat! As she rolled, we watched the bears get ever closer to the den. When '06 realized she had taken her eye off the ball, she took off like a rocket.

Launching herself into the intruders again, she got them to follow her to a meadow well away from the den. But by now, the bears and wolf were exhausted. Mama bear tried to bed with her cubs, but to keep the bears moving, '06 started lunging and barking again. A few yards farther down, the bears relaxed a bit to enjoy some grazing, and '06 sat down to rest her weary body, content to watch them as long as they kept moving. Once satisfied they were leaving, she moved up the hill where she could see both the den and the bears.

*On May 9, 2010, a grizzly sow
and two yearling cubs inspected
the area of '06's den.*



As the bears disappeared from sight behind a forest, '06 jumped up and hustled down the hill into the trees. Soon she emerged and headed for the den as the bears continued east. Satisfied they were out of her hair, she took the long road home, checking every nook and cranny, searching and sniffing every rock.

For seven long hours, she had successfully defended her pups and worn out both the bears and her observers! It was time for us to go home and rest up for the next day—and the next adventure of the great '06 wolf.

A Remarkable Hunt (July 26, 2010 — pups 3 months old)

A slow start to the day changed suddenly as '06 (the “stealth wolf!”) came charging out of the trees, hot on the hooves of a cow elk and calf. Perhaps sensing wolves can't attack and tread water at the same time, the elk ran for deep water in the creek. But she underestimated '06's tactical skill! Getting between the cow and her calf, '06 feinted toward the calf, drawing the mother elk in closer to her. In a flash, '06 caught and killed the cow and then turned to the calf. Although the young

calf gave her more trouble than the cow, she soon got it, too.

Alone with a banquet that would last the pack several days, '06 rested before she opened the carcass and began her meal. The carcass was on the creek edge, so she had to stand in the water to eat. The ledge above the creek made her wary because she couldn't see over the top. Several times she climbed the bank to look around. Sure enough—a coyote! Seeing that wolf all alone made the coyote courageous, and it boldly approached. Chasing it off in a hurry, '06 headed back up the hill to the den.

She returned in a few minutes with no pups and what seemed to be a quizzical look on her face. Stomach bulging, she started caching food here and there, traveling to the trees east and west of the den, choosing her hiding places carefully. She disappeared along a rocky ledge, but at 7:30 p.m., she was back on the elk cow carcass, noticeably smaller now than it had been at noon! Still alone, '06 continued to work this whole meal by



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herself. When we left at dark, she was still eating, but what remained of the carcass floated out of sight in back of a small knoll.

The calf carcass was on an island and most likely would not drift away. The wolf may have known that and left the remains there deliberately. We hoped the two adult males would come after dark and help her manage this meal. In the past week, '06 had made three kills on her own, and I reflected that those guys had better hurry and step up to the plate. I wished '06's father, the legendary 113M, had been around to see his girl hunt. I like to think he would have been so proud.





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Mother and Pups (August 2, 2010 — pups 3.5 months old)

At first light, the pups led '06 and the two males toward the creek. The adults intended to hunt, but the pups, old enough now to show independence, had different ideas and would not be left behind. So it was “yahoo and merrily through” the meadow below the den! As playful as her pups, '06 showed the youngsters their mother's strength and speed. Svelte, fit and muscular, she ran like a greyhound, twisting and turning. What a mom!

A bull elk grazing to the east saw the wolves and went on alert, raising his head to show off his six-point antlers. When '06 spotted the big guy, she went into a stalk with fewer than 200 yards (183 m) between them. Then the chase was on! Three of the pups went right along with their mom, thoroughly enjoying their first hunt. But after sizing the old boy up

and deciding he was too strong even for her, '06 broke off the chase.

Now it was “hidey-ho-and-away-we-go” back to the meadow flats with reckless abandon. The pups raced down to explore the fascinating creek. Water play was great, but falling off the cut bank was even better. The adult males, more serious about hunting, tried to get the pups back to the den, but mom didn't help! She kept romping with her babes until at last, four pooped puppies straggled up the hill and home. Finally the adults could start hunting.

The Saga Continues (October 3, 2010 — pups 5.5 months old)

It is 81 degrees today, but in the bitter cold of winter, I will look back with longing for these warm days. Day before yesterday, we spotted '06 eating

a bear cub! And speaking of other wildlife, the beautiful coyotes taking advantage of wolf kills get almost as much camera attention from visitors as the wolves. A copy of the book *I Am Somebody, Too* should be dedicated to the coyotes!

Frequently '06 crosses the public road without looking, paying no mind to cars and people, and I sometimes fear for her safety. She has filled our notebooks with thrilling wolf behavior—and she still does, almost every day! We have so much to look forward to in the months ahead. ■

Laurie Lyman, a former teacher, is a veteran Yellowstone wolf watcher. Her knowledge about the wolf packs and of the individual wolves of the northern tier of the park has made her a valuable assistant to Yellowstone wolf researcher and expert Rick McIntyre.