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Sunday, July 10, 1994

WOLF HYBRIDS: THE FANTASY
PET OF THE NINETIES

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, July 10--Pet owners enchanted by recent movies and television shows that have popularized wolf hybrids as pets need to "see through the fantasy and into the reality of owning a potentially dangerous pet," Elisabeth Duman told an audience at the 131st annual convention of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), July 9-13, at the Moscone Center.

Wolf hybrids are part wolf and part dog. In past years, most wolf/dogs were bred to be more dog than wolf. "The tendency more recently has been toward 'high-content' hybrids, and any animal that is very much wolf is going to exhibit dominant wolf behavioral traits," reported Ms. Duman, the Regional Coordinator for the North American Wildlife Park Foundation.

According to Ms. Duman, there are distinct differences between a wolf and a dog. "Wolves are slim animals with a full coat of hair making them look heavier. The chest is very narrow; the front legs are close together with feet pointing out and long splayed toes. Wolves have a large head with eyes slanted and gold to yellow in color. The tail is a 'brush' with fur round in cross-section; it is never curled or flopped over the back."

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Wolf Hybrids/add 1

"Often people think that malamutes and Siberian huskies look just like wolves, but they are built to pull, with broader chests and shorter legs," she said. "Wolves don't have the cute facial mask of a huskie or malamute, either."

According to Ms. Duman, some potential problems with these high-content hybrid wolves include:

- ▶ **Hyperactivity** - If the hybrid exhibits more wolf traits, it will be hyperactive and very inquisitive. The animal may be shy or hard to physically restrain.
- ▶ **Dominance behavior** - At sexual maturity, the animal may challenge humans for dominance, perhaps attacking someone the animal judges vulnerable.
- ▶ **Territoriality** - Wolves do not tolerate contact with animals outside their pack. Hybrid owners are often surprised when at sexual maturity their "pets" decide to systematically attack and kill their neighbor's dogs.
- ▶ **Predatory behavior toward children** - In 1993, eleven children were killed by wolf-type "pets". The animals had shown no sign of hostility before, killing the children quickly and efficiently without warning.

Fortunately, many hybrid owners who fear their pet is more wolf have been misled and have hybrids that are more dog. If an animal does exhibit wolf traits, though, it should not be kept as a family pet.

Proper housing is a priority for the high-content hybrids.

Wolf Hybrids/add 2

Ms. Duman recommends an enclosure of at least 1,600 square feet. The fence needs to be strong and at least eight feet high with an overhang into the pen. A fence skirt placed on the ground and connected to the fence prevents digging under the pen. Another fence, installed a few feet outside the pen, prevents children from reaching in to pet the animals. It may be overkill, but three children lost their arms last year to "friendly" hybrids.

Several states have enacted laws restricting the keeping of wolf hybrids as pets. The AVMA discourages the keeping of wild animals as pets, because of problems associated with disease, diet, exercise, housing and traumatic injury.

The AVMA, based in the Chicago suburb of Schaumburg, is the professional association of 55,500 veterinarians. Over 300 scientific presentations were made at the 131st annual meeting, one of the largest gatherings of veterinarians in North America.