

NEVER CRY WOLF

By Joanne V. Baldwin, D.V.M.

Wolf hybrids have been called time bombs and their ownership has been universally discouraged by animal experts including veterinarians, behaviorists, wildlife biologist, etc. I too, discourage anyone from owning a wolf hybrid but not because the animals are inherently unstable but because the vast majority of people are not equipped to deal with them. The big mistake people make is in thinking they are getting a big dog who LOOKS like a wolf! What they are getting, instead, is a wolf and wolves do not make good pets. Wolves do not react, think or behave as dogs do. Dogs are the result of thousands of years of selection for "pet" qualities. What people who acquire wolves or hybrids find out is that they have to be constantly vigilant in dealing with them because a wolf will never give up the attempt to become the alpha or dominant animal...any sign of weakness and the wolf may challenge you. Estimates are that 80-90% of owners experience serious problems by the time their animals mature around age 3. Since 1986, nine children in the U.S. have been killed by hybrids...many more people have been maimed. In an article on hybrids in Smithsonian Magazine, June 1994, most former owners of hybrids report having been bitten by their own animals. Take in hybrid and you toss out thousands of years of domestication.

As pups, most wolves/hybrids are playful and affectionate. When the animals mature and their wild nature conflicts with the behavior required of a pet serious problems arise. Most wolves/hybrids are impossible to housebreak (marking territory by urination) and destructive to furnishings (which they destroy in their quest to find out "what is on the other side"). As they become destructive, owners banish them to the outdoors where they are capable of escaping all but the sturdiest of enclosures or chains. Once loose, the predatory instinct surfaces and they prey on livestock, cats, other dogs, or small children, especially if they scream or run. Contrary to claims of some unscrupulous breeders, wolf-hybrids do not make "excellent guard dogs". Most hybrids are shy and may, if cornered, bite from fear rather than from viciousness.

The failure of the wolf-hybrid as a pet lies in unrealistic expectations on the part of owners as to their character and behavior. Unless people are willing to adapt their lives to revolve around a wild animal then it is best if they choose a dog if a dog is what they want. When people deny the reality of the nature of the wolf-hybrid the animal suffers in the end. If there is a villain in the wolf-hybrid problem it is in the breeder who churns them out and foists them off on an unsuspecting public as "intelligent super dogs"! By the time the animal matures and the owner finds out that he doesn't have a dog at all, the damage is done and another animal suffers or is destroyed.

In Virginia, the wolf-hybrid is classified as a wild animal. A permit from the state is required to keep one and some localities (like the city of Richmond) have banned them. There is no rabies vaccine approved for use in the wolf-hybrid so, even if a veterinarian chooses to vaccinate one (which they may IF they clearly mark on the rabies certificate that the animal is a wolf-hybrid AND have the owner sign a release stating that they have been informed that the vaccine is not approved for wolf-hybrids), if the hybrid bites someone it will be treated as an unvaccinated WILD animal. This means that the authorities can confiscate the animal and remove it's head for rabies examination. The wisest course of action is to admire the wolf where it belongs, in the wild, not in your living room.

No longer valid