



THINK LIKE A WOLF - VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

When we think of wolves, we often think of power and wildness. But what if I told you their greatest strength is actually in how they think together?

Hi guys, my name's Taylor Rabe, and I am a wolf researcher in Yellowstone National Park, and I serve as Conservation Nation's education and engagement facilitator.

I've been observing wolves in the wild for years, and I've learned from the best, including Rick McIntyre, who has spent more than 40 years observing wolves in the wild all across America's national parks, with over 100,000 wolf observations. Rick has written a series of books to share his experiences of wolves in Yellowstone with people from all over the world. And Rick has shown me that to truly understand wolves, we need to think like them. I invite you all on a journey on how to think like a wolf.

You'll hear more from Rick, and you'll also meet my colleague and friend, Rosie Sanchez. They'll help you understand that wolves don't just survive the wilderness, they thrive. They know how to lead, how to listen, and how to make decisions as a group. Let's get started.

Hi everyone, my name is Rosie Sanchez, and I am the fellow with Conservation Nation and the carnivore biologist with the Nez Perch Tribe. I'm so excited to help you explore the mind of a wolf and discover what wolves can teach us about wisdom, trust, and the power of a team.

The Power of a Pack

Wolves don't text, they don't email each other, and yet they know exactly when to move, when to hunt, and when to rest. That's because their leaders earn trust over time. Wolves live in family groups called packs. They're very strategic. Each member has a role, like positions on the soccer team. Some flank, some chase, some wait. It only works because they trust each other. These cooperative roles increase each individual's chance of surviving and reproducing, especially in environments where food is limited or hard to catch. By studying wolves across different ecosystems, researchers like Rick can predict patterns in how pack structure, communication, and hunting behaviors support success in varied environments. Why do you think wolves form packs instead of living alone? What might be the advantages of that behavior? How can you support this idea based on what you've already seen or read?

Wolf Communication



If one wolf acts too soon or too late, a hunt can fail. That's why communication matters, even when it's silent. Wolves communicate through body language and sounds—growls, howls, and tail positions. Even a silent glance, change in posture, or pause can reveal a lot. Do you ever communicate with your friends or family without saying a word? Try wolf communication. Partner up and use your face and body to show feelings without words. See if your partner can guess what you're trying to communicate: vámonos, danger, fear, or anger.

Each wolf pack has a leader. The leader isn't always the biggest or the strongest. Often it's the one who knows the most—the one who remembers where elk herds moved last winter, or who stays calm under pressure. Wolf 8 was a leader. He was the smallest, the runt, adopted by a pack that wasn't even his family. And yet, he became a leader. Wolf 8's leadership shows us that behavior, not size nor strength, is often the key to survival. His choices, based on learning and empathy, allowed his pack to raise pups successfully in a challenging environment.

You might wonder why we call wolves things like Wolf 8 or Wolf 21, instead of giving them regular names. In Yellowstone, wolves are identified by numbers and letters to remind us they're wild animals. This helps scientists study them without getting too attached, so wolves stay wild and keep their natural role in the ecosystem.

Today, I'm honored to introduce someone truly extraordinary, Rick McIntyre. A now-retired field biologist with the Yellowstone Wolf Project, Rick has spent more than 25 years observing, tracking, and sharing the stories of Yellowstone's wild wolves with the world. But Rick's legacy goes far beyond the data. He is one of the most humble, generous, and dedicated people I've ever known. I've had the immense privilege of being mentored by Rick, and I'm so excited for you to get to know him better in this Thinking Like a Wolf module. Get ready to see Yellowstone's wolves through the eyes of someone who knows them like no one else. Happy tails.

Wolf 8: Unlikely Hero

As far as we know, 8 had never won a fight in his life. He was bullied and picked on when he was young, so he really had a hard time. But sometimes in life, the important thing was he showed up. Wolf 8's story isn't just science. It's about empathy, trust, forgiveness—things we don't always associate with wild animals. But maybe we should.

In the Rose Creek family, the father wolf was illegally shot and killed after he had sired eight pups. Months later, Wolf 8 came along, joined the family, paired off with their mother, Wolf 9, and essentially adopted and raised those pups. He was with those pups he was raising—they were now



about a year old—when we saw more wolves: the Druid pack. They were super aggressive at that time. Leading the charge coming downhill was their alpha male, 38, the wolf that had killed 8’s father. We all looked at 8. He was with those eight yearlings. He looked at the much larger alpha male coming down, and with no hesitation, he charged uphill. Although 8 was fully grown, he was very small compared to 38. But now he was an alpha male. He had the responsibility of raising those yearlings, unrelated to him. Back at the den, there were three new pups he had sired. It was up to him to do something about this enemy.

They were both gray. When they smashed into each other, they rolled on the ground as they fought. You couldn’t really see who was winning. Then it became clear: the little guy had won. He was standing over the big wolf and had him totally at his mercy. 8 stepped back and let him go, spared his life, and chased him out of the territory—8’s tail straight up, the other’s straight down. What traits helped Wolf 8 become a leader? Use evidence from Rick’s observations or what you’ve read or heard so far to support your answer.

The Rise of Wolf 21

Soon after that, 21 left home. He joined the Druid pack and lived a very long life. He became the undisputed, undefeated heavyweight champion of Yellowstone—never lost a fight. But based on what he saw his adopted father do that day, he never killed an opponent; he always let the other wolf go. If any of our wolves could be called a superhero, it was 21.

Full Circle: Wolf 8 and Wolf 21

Later, one of 8’s daughters was killed by a Druid wolf. When 8 found the remains, he would have picked up the scent of the Druid wolves—of 21, the wolf he had raised and trained. In a sense, they had been best friends. From 8’s viewpoint, you can make a strong case for him feeling a huge betrayal.

The Rose Creek wolves with 8 came in from one side, and the Druids with 21 from the other. They saw each other and charged like they were going to fight. Normally, the alpha males seek each other out. 8 was very old now, with physical disabilities. Even on his best day, he could never have defeated 21—21 was invincible. Despite that, 8 was going to fight to protect his family. There was no way for 8 to survive this. As they closed in at about 35 miles an hour, at the last second, 21 ran right past 8. There was no fight. He was willing to let it look like he was afraid and running away rather than harm the wolf who had adopted him. It worked. What seemed destined for a violent end was



defused because 21 had the intelligence and willpower to find another way at the last possible second under intense pressure. (music playing)

Wolves and Their Environment

Wolf 8 and 21—and all wolves—need a healthy ecosystem with food, water, and space. Monitoring wolves helps us gauge the health of their environment. That’s why they’re called a keystone species. When wolves were removed from Yellowstone in the early 1900s, elk numbers grew too large. Overgrazing damaged plants and hurt other animals. After wolves like 8 and 21 returned, elk numbers began to balance, with changes seen throughout the ecosystem. Plants recovered, beavers built more dams, and rivers even changed course. When food resources like elk are too abundant, the entire ecosystem can be thrown off balance. This shows how changes in resources affect entire populations. This is called a trophic cascade—when predators affect the whole ecosystem. (music playing)

Observing wolves has taught us so much about their behavior. By tracking their movements, we see how the pack coordinates hunts—how some chase and others wait. We can also observe other important things, like migration patterns of prey species or how competitors move across the landscape. These clues help us understand the health of an ecosystem.

When you think like a wolf, you start to see the secrets to how a pack survives and thrives. First, you need to trust. It’s the foundation that lets every wolf work together as one. Next, there are clear rules. In a pack, every wolf has a job—and those jobs can mean the difference between life and death. Wolves also know communication is vital, but it isn’t always about howling. Sometimes, silence speaks volumes. And when it comes to leadership, it’s not about being the biggest or the strongest. It’s about having the right character. Great leaders also show empathy. They care for every member of the pack.

As top predators, wolves have a huge impact on their environment. In Yellowstone, they’re part of a trophic cascade—that’s when adding or removing a top predator, like wolves, changes the entire food chain and even the whole ecosystem. Pretty wild, right?

Thank you all so much for joining us today. When we study wolves, we’re not just learning about animals. We’re learning about how nature builds systems—how cooperation, strategy, and empathy play out in the wild to shape entire environments. I hope you enjoyed thinking like a wolf and that you continue to explore the Conservation Nation Academy.



Now it's your turn. Your educator will guide you through an activity to help you explore more about how keystone species, like wolves, impact an ecosystem. I hope you found some inspiration in this lesson and can apply some wolf behaviors to your own life. Keep asking questions, keep making observations, and most importantly, don't forget to think like a wolf.

I've always known what I've wanted to do since I was a child. It initially started with wanting to save the Sumatran tigers in Indonesia. The next thing I'd like y'all to know is that I'm an ice climber. I prefer the cold to the summer. Ice climbing is like rock climbing, but you strap "knives" to your boots and hands and climb up waterfalls.