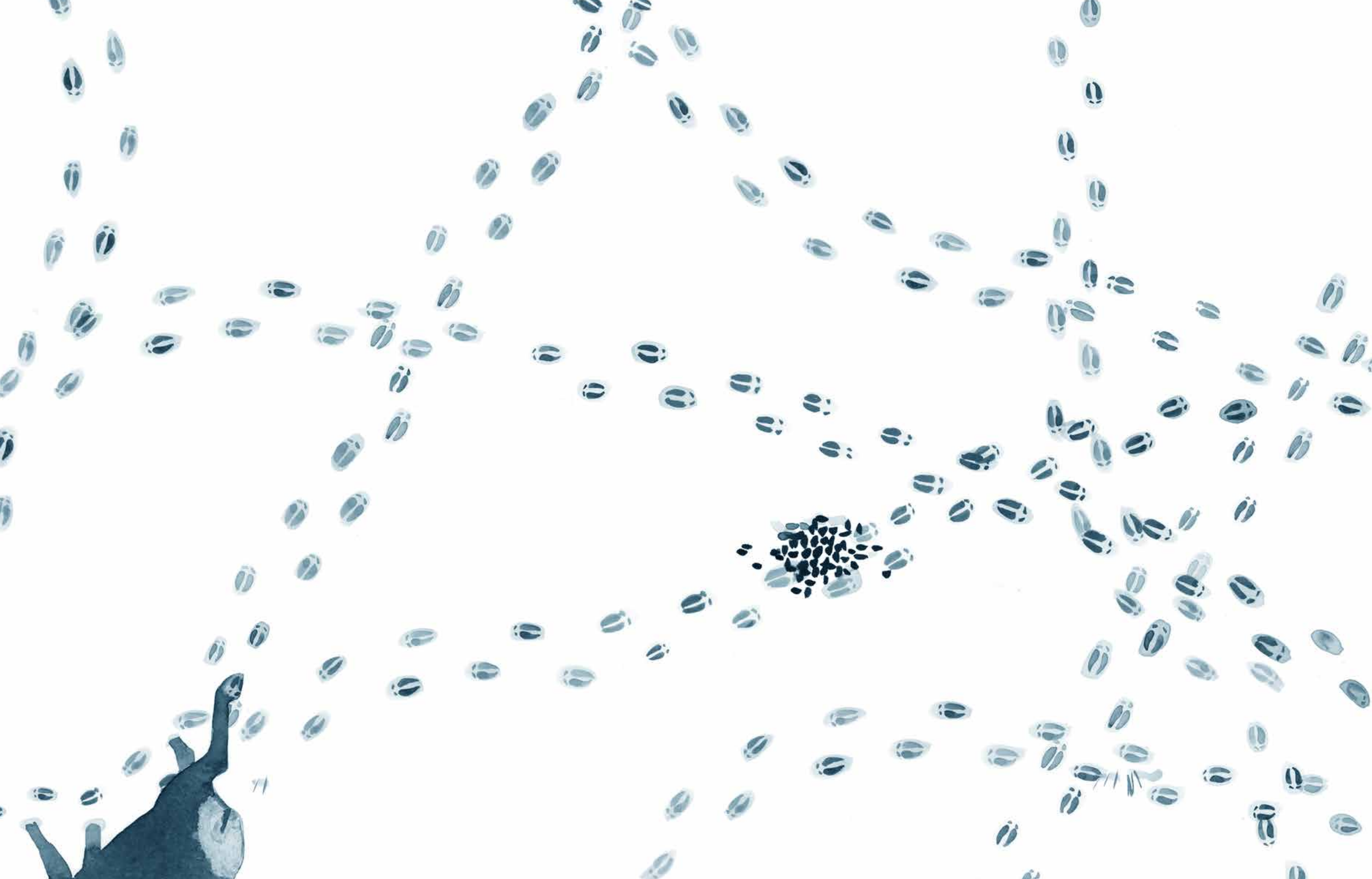


CATHERINE BARR JENNI DESMOND

FOURTEEN WOLVES



BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

For Web with love, for wilderness adventures still to come. C.B.

For my wonderful Grandma, who loves books, nature, colour and noticing little things. J. D.



BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2021 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Catherine Barr, 2021
Illustrations copyright © Jenni Desmond, 2021

Catherine Barr and Jenni Desmond have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author and Illustrator of this work

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5266-0749-2

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Printed and bound in China by Leo Paper Products, Heshan, Guangdong

All papers used by Bloomsbury Plc are natural, recyclable products from wood grown in well managed forests. The manufacturing process conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters

With thanks to Leo Leckie, Yellowstone wolf historian and storyteller, Sian Jones, longtime Yellowstone Wolf Watcher, UK Wolf Conservation Trust and Mel Newton.

THE WOLVES OF YELLOWSTONE PARK

The wolf is admired and feared in equal measure.

Shrouded in myth, this legendary predator has been shot, caught and captured by humans for thousands of years.

Farmers beware the glint of yellow eyes in the darkness, fearing a wolf has come to snatch their sleeping livestock, while trophy hunters seek out the wolf's thick, soft coat.

In fairy tales, the wolf's cry makes some shudder and others lock their doors.

But for many people, the wolf's haunting howl carries a wild magic – a magic that once restored a barren land.

A WILD AND BEAUTIFUL PLACE

In America, there is a park – a spectacular landscape sprawled across a sleeping volcano deep in the wilderness.

Spanning almost 9,000 square kilometres, this immense park is found in the three states of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. On 1 March 1872, Yellowstone Park became the world's first national park. Four million people from around the world visit it each year.

In the park there are rocks of every colour, boiling hot lakes and bubbling pools of mud. Snow-topped mountains reach towards the sky and, separated by wide valleys, there are dramatic canyons and rushing rivers. Hundreds of waterfalls gush down valley slopes. Here, some of the world's most famous geysers, natural hot foutains, shoot boiling water high into the air, while dark lakes reflect these surroundings like mirrors.

Yellowstone is home to thousands of different kinds of wildlife. Over 150 species of birds circle the sky above the park and nest in its thick forests. Colourful fish in all shapes and sizes swim through the streams. Proud elk and shaggy bison roam the wide plains. The park is the perfect hunting ground for large predators. Lynx, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, coyotes and wolves all gather to seek out prey.

But Yellowstone Park hasn't always teemed with life. For once it was a place without wolves.

WITHOUT WOLVES

For hundreds of years wolves ruled Yellowstone Park. They roamed free and fierce over the wild plains, hunting the elk and other animals that lived in this faraway land.

But as the years passed, hunters came and went. They snared the wolves for their warm fur and shot them if they chased or killed cattle.

The tracks of wolf packs that had claimed and crossed the park's remote valleys vanished. Yowling wolf pups that once splashed through its rivers and streams disappeared.

The land fell silent.

Without wolves, life in the park changed ...

Without wolves, the elk had no fear. They grazed the open valleys from sunrise to sunset.

Without wolves, the elk ate and ate and ate. They ripped up grass and tore down leaves. They nibbled the young shoots that lined the riverbanks, so no new trees grew. The once lush grasslands became barren and brown.

As more elk filled the wide valleys, other wildlife began to disappear. Without new trees, birds found they had no place to nest and so many abandoned the park for another home. Other animals lost their shelter and couldn't find enough food. Bears, beavers, rabbits and foxes became less and less ...

Until one cold winter's day. In 1995, after a 20-year battle between government officials, lawyers, scientists and conservationists, a decision was finally made to reintroduce wolves to the park.

This is the story of their homecoming.

· PART ONE ·

COMING HOME

SKY VIEW

This story begins in the sky.

High above the Canadian Rockies, a helicopter arcs above a line of wolves lunging through the snow. A man wearing a harness leans out, bracing himself against the bitter wind. He takes aim and fires. Then, he unclips his harness and leaps out of the helicopter before it peels away.

The man has darted a wolf. It stumbles and falls … and is soon asleep. Waiting hands on the ground help the man, as he struggles to carry this beast across the snow. Together, they heave this soft, sleeping creature onto a waiting sled.

The sled dogs fidget, whimper and stretch. But when the driver steps up, the pack lurches forward across the snow. The wolf is carried away into inky darkness.

Another wolf is darted. Then another. And another. This continues until fourteen wolves are carried through the night on sleds speeding towards a new home faraway.

NIGHT JOURNEY

The procession heads south. The Canadian wolves crouch in cold metal crates. In a small plane they fly over rugged lands.

Soon, they are hidden inside a truck and travelling down a highway that cuts through some of the wildest country in North America. The truck brakes slowly. It pulls over. The crates are lifted on to sleighs, this time pulled by mules with ice-crusted manes. These hardy animals weave their way into the heart of Yellowstone Park. In the distance herds of elk gather in the darkness.

When the sleigh reaches the specially built enclosures deep in the park, the crates are finally unlocked. A brave black wolf steps out on to the white snow. His giant paws spread like snowshoes. He scans his new home with curious, intelligent eyes.



He is the first wolf to step into this wild place for seventy years.



WATCH AND WAIT

The wolves are kept in pens in three places in the park, each covering an acre of snow-blanketed land.

Although the wolves long to escape, they must stay in captivity for a little longer. If they are released too soon, the wolves' natural homing instinct will pull them north back towards Canada. In the pens, living is easy. People bring elk, deer, moose or bison carcasses to the wolves twice a week so they can feed.



Behind the fences, the wolves bond and three packs begin to form, each one led by a dominant alpha male and female. This alpha pair is in charge; they are respected and feared by the other wolves in their pack.



The wolves wait for freedom. They pace the fences surrounding the pens. They learn new scents, sights and sounds. They sense the wilderness beyond.

Ten weeks pass.
At last, it is time
for the wolves to be
released.





ON THE RUN

The pens are flung open but the wolves stand still. Watching scientists hold their breath.

They are not the only ones standing by. Many local ranchers and hunters are angry that the wolves have been allowed to return, and so they linger in the shadows ready to shoot and kill. Armed guards protected the wolves day and night in the pens. But in the wild, the wolves will have to look out for themselves.

After three days the wary predators break free from their guards' watch and cross into the wild. One-by-one, the wolves take slow, careful steps beyond the boundary ... quickening as they vanish into the forest.

Now free, each pack establishes its own territory. Scientists name the packs after the area of the park where they are released, calling them Crystal Creek Pack, Rose Creek Pack and Soda Butte Pack. Later, these three packs will become four, as two wolves leave Crystal Creek Pack to begin life together as Leopold Pack.

Eventually all the wolves vanish from sight. But they are not lost. Each wolf has been given a number and a radio collar, so it can be tracked. Signals from the collar will help scientists map the wolves' travels: to discover where they go and learn how they live.

Each pack journeys far and wide through dark forests, across wild rivers and up steep mountains.

The wolves of Yellowstone Park are back on the run.



ELK ENCOUNTER

During winter in Yellowstone Park, animals face a relentless fight for survival. Temperatures plummet below -40°C, rivers freeze and a heavy blanket of snow cloaks the earth. Food is scarce and everyone is hungry.

Wolves need to eat and wolves eat elk ...

When the wolves return, there are 25,000 elk in the park. In winter, the elk tread in each other's footsteps as they travel, saving energy to find food. They make their way towards the flat fields in the valleys where the snow is soft and the grass underneath is easier to graze. But there is not enough food to fill their bellies – the elk are weak and hungry.

The wolves, however, are strong. The elk are easy to spot in the open plains. The wolf pack watch them, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. They look for patches of deep snow, water and ice, where elk may get stuck or fall.

The best time to hunt is when the sun is low and long shadows reach across the land. As the sun sinks, the elk stiffen, heads held high. Ears twitch, eyes widen and male antlers shift across the fading light. None of the herd has ever seen a wolf here, yet instinct still tells them that danger is coming. Frightened, they huddle closer together.

Black ravens watch as the wolves wait for sunset. And then the hunt is on.

