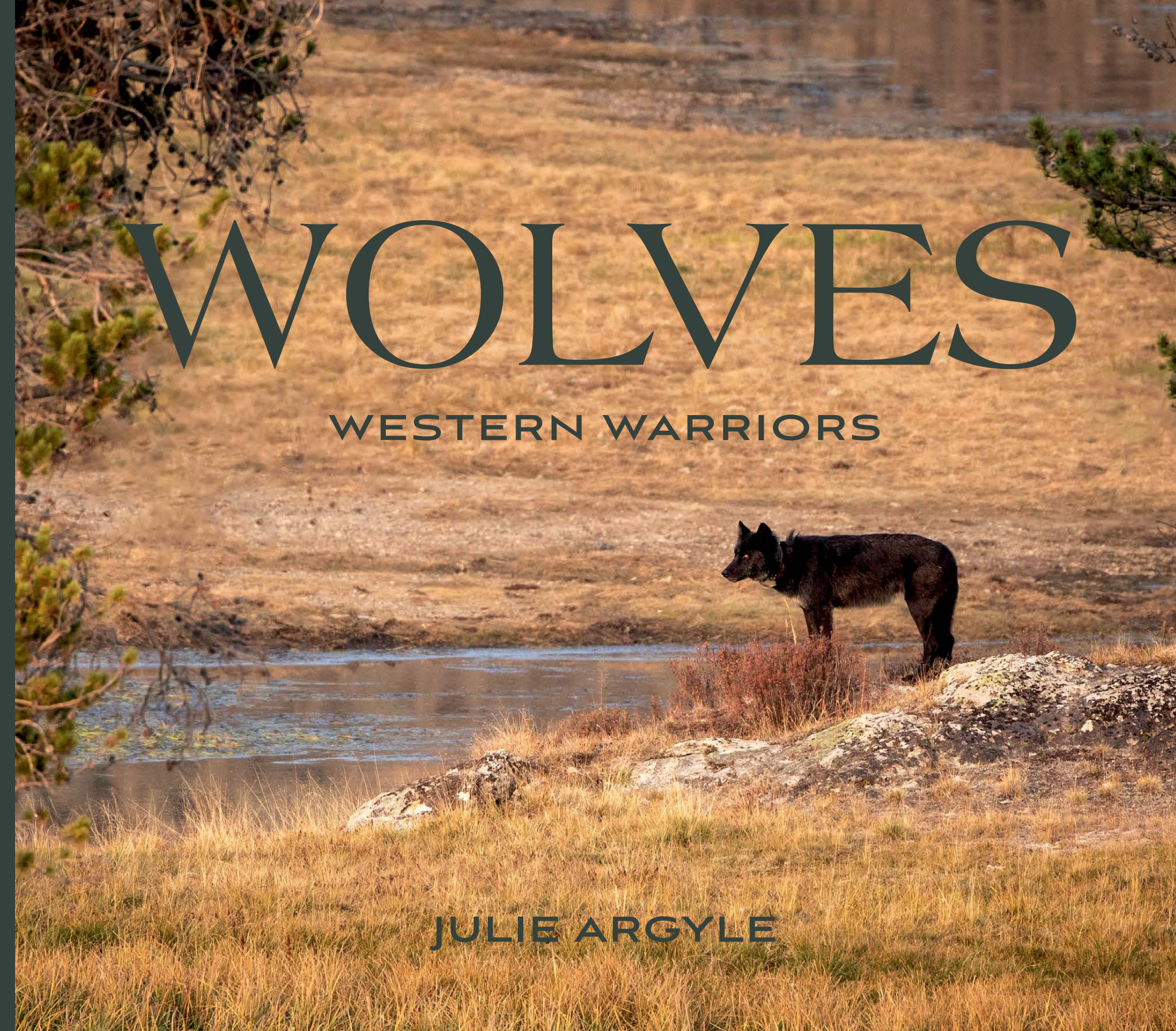




WOLVES

ARGYLE

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WOLVES

WESTERN WARRIORS

JULIE ARGYLE

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WOLVES

WESTERN WARRIORS

THE POWERFUL AND MAJESTIC North American wolves, often considered dangerous vermin, struggle to simply survive in the wild and in a world where many humans wish to exterminate them. In *Wolves: Western Warriors*, Julie Argyle's stunning photography explores wolf behavior, family dynamics, and life in the wilderness of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. She includes information about the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone and the ongoing struggle to keep them listed as an endangered species. With personal observations about the Wapiti Lake Pack, among others, and several notable individual wolves, Argyle explores the complex existence of this frequently misunderstood, incredible animal.

The strikingly beautiful and almost eerie images woven together with history, research, and stories provide an up-close encounter with this intelligent and fascinating species that still requires our protection to ensure its future for generations—ours and the wolves—to come.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, and certainly for as long as I can remember, wolves have been hated, hunted, and exterminated. They have been labeled as the “Big Bad Wolf” and have been the demons of childhood bad dreams. They were frequently considered as monsters that would follow you home and the moment you weren’t looking, attack and consume you. The myths and legends of the past were so awful that even people in their right minds were scared to walk alone in the dark for fear of being attacked by a wolf.

The hate for these animals was so contagious that people everywhere wanted them dead, and anyone who crossed their paths would kill them on the spot. Not only were people scared of wolves, but they also believed they would wipe out an entire population of game animals if they were allowed to live in a certain area. Because of this, wolves were eradicated from many wild places, including Yellowstone, where they were eliminated through strategic hunting and by the intentional introduction of fatal diseases like sarcoptic mange. But if the wolves were going to wipe out all of the ungulates in and around Yellowstone, they would have done so a long time ago. Wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone more than twenty-five years ago, yet plenty of elk still roam the park.

Interestingly enough, Indigenous people described wolves as family members representing loyalty, family ties, communication, education, understanding, and intelligence. They had a connection with wolves and knew truths that somehow got buried along the way.

Most of the time wolves appear as a dot on the landscape; other times, you get lucky and have the encounter of a lifetime. Regardless, it is a thrill whenever you see them. Wolves are among the most captivating animals I have ever spent time watching. From their mannerisms to their love for and loyalty to their pack, they are truly one of the most unique animals on the planet. When it comes to wolves, you either love them or you hate them, and people aren’t afraid to speak their minds.



If the wolf is exterminated, we shall have lost one of the most virile, wise, and beautiful of all wild creatures.

—JOHN STANWELL-FLETCHER, *Natural History* magazine





Those early spring months were confusing. We had random sightings of wolves in the valley, but 1091F and the uncollared adult from the Mollie's Pack seemed to be the only ones we would reliably see. The alphas appeared once in a while, but not very often. After I observed their movements for quite some time, my theory was that the alpha female had denned somewhere new and she would come over to visit her daughter once in a while, and that's when we would see her. Similarly, 1091F would cross the road quite often and disappear out of sight, possibly going to visit her mom.

A short time later we learned from the Wolf Project, the organization that oversees research and monitoring of wolves in Yellowstone, that the alpha female had indeed denned somewhere new. We also learned that when 1091F had been collared, they discovered she was in estrus. I was thrilled. All of my observations were correct. I had learned so much about wolves that year by observing and watching them.

Spring quickly turned to summer, and in July, after months of waiting, puppies were finally seen. 1091F decided to parade her five pups across the valley and join her mom in another location. She was such a young mother, but she was totally dedicated to those five little ones. She made sure they made it through the river, up the hill, and across the road safely.

Next to the alpha female, 1091F became my favorite wolf. I had watched her grow from a puppy to a yearling and then to an adult. I spent more time watching her than any other wolf, and she had taught me so much about wolves in general.

Sadly, that following winter she died. It is believed she was killed while hunting for food for her family, probably kicked by a bison. The Wolf Project received her mortality signal on January 3, 2018. In the week prior to that, I had seen pictures of the pack and had noticed that she wasn't with them. When a friend sent a mes-

sage saying he had something to tell me, I already knew in my heart what he was going to say.

I remember a day earlier that year when 1091F had crossed the road and left a few wolves back on the other side. I snapped a picture of one of them howling to her, and it seemed as if he was calling her home. I think about that often and wonder if at the time of her death, the pack had that same reaction. I truly believe they did.

Since then, I have continued to watch this pack regularly—or at least when they allow themselves to be seen. I remember watching as the adults paraded the pups across the valley for the first time, I assume to show them their territory. Those little pups bounced all over and were so mischievous the entire way. I've watched them play along the riverbed, chasing each other through the water and playing tug of war with sticks. I've seen them do a dog pile, where several of them jump on top of one unsuspecting wolf. And then there are the times they grab and pull one another by the tail. The love these animals have for each other is heartwarming. Their curiosity and zest for life is like no other. They truly are a family.

In the winter of 2018–2019, the Wapiti Pack traveled to the northern tier of Yellowstone and had some type of encounter with the 8 Mile Pack. The alpha female returned south with part of her pack, but her mate 1015M and several other males from the pack stayed behind and eventually joined the 8 Mile Pack. 1014M followed the alpha female to the south and soon became the new alpha male of the Wapiti Lake Pack. Since then, they have been going strong and are still one of the biggest packs in the park.

Born in 2010, the alpha female of the Wapiti Lake Pack is now the oldest wolf in the park. At eleven years old, she has turned white like her mother and grandmother, and she is simply beautiful. She has by far surpassed the usual age to which a wild wolf lives, and I have been lucky to watch her for so many years. She holds a place in



JULIE ARGYLE is a professional photographer who has spent many years observing and photographing wolves, along with other wildlife, in the Rocky Mountain West. Her photography business, Wild Love Images, has grown to capture the lives and stories of much of the wildlife in the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, and Argyle is an active voice for their preservation and protection. She lives near Ogden, Utah.