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American Chronicle - Interview with Wolf Photographer Monty Sloan by Cassandra Bell July 18, 2005

I recently interviewed renowned wolf photographer Monty Sloan.

Bell: How long have you been involved in wolf photography?

Sloan: I started back in 1984 at the San Francisco Zoo. I was a student at UC Berkeley and working on a degree in Geology. I became interested in wolves and was working on an Independent Study project. I was also an amateur photographer and of course took photos of the wolves. For the first time, people began asking to buy my photographs.

Bell: Have you ever photographed wild wolves, and if so, what was one of your most memorable experiences?

Sloan: Wild wolves are very elusive and shy, but since their reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park, there is at least one place in the world, easily accessible, where one has a good chance to see wolves in the wild. They are still at a great distance and so I use a Canon 500mm f4 lens with a 2x extender. Even then, they are often too far off to photograph.

On my first trip to YNP in March 2003, I was invited along as technical support and guest lecturer for Pat Goodmann and Linda Thurstan's course on wolf behavior at the Yellowstone Institute. Part of these programs involves early morning and late afternoon wolf observations. Of course finding the wolves can be the hard part and one chilly morning, after spending over an hour waiting for a wolf to show up, an Elk suddenly appeared on a small ridge across the road some 100m away. I immediately focused my lens on the elk just to get some nice bull elk photos and not one, but two young female wolves appeared right behind. They had been chasing the elk, not that they would have had much of a chance with this healthy animal, but young wolves often test their skills in this way.

The elk, on the other hand, was faced with somewhat of a dilemma. Wolves were on one side, people were on the other. He paused, assessed the situation and exited stage right ;-)

In the 20 seconds or so of the encounter, I was able to snap off several nice photos of the three of them standing there. Of course our close proximity (100m is very close for the wolves, and somewhat close for the

elk for that matter) caused the animals to veer off, but sometimes things like that are unavoidable when animals approach the road.

I have this encounter as well as some other YNP wolf photos available at www.wolfphotography.com There is a Yellowstone category, or just search for Yellowstone to find them.

Bell: What other wildlife have you photographed, and what was one of your most memorable experiences with them?

Sloan: I have been to YNP several times as well as Denali National Park and the Jasper/Banff areas of Canada, but YNP remains the best. Mule deer, Bison, Elk are all right there along the roads, but my favorite, aside from the wolves of course, are the coyotes. I have taken several very close photographs of coyotes in YNP and on this last trip our group had several encounters where habituated coyotes approached within a few feet. That was quite enjoyable.

Bell: To what states have you travelled to photograph wildlife?

Sloan: California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Michigan (for some great waterfowl shots) and YNP for animals out in the wild, but just about everywhere but the Southeast for captive wildlife.

I also have visited, photographed and even lectured at a number of facilities in the UK and Poland.

Bell: With what organizations are you associated?

Sloan: Wolf Park of course, I have been working here since 1988, but I have been involved with a number of other facilities such as Wolf Timbers in Ohio, Animal Ark in Nevada, Wolfson of Alaska, and years ago the Folsom City Zoo, SF Zoo, California Wolf Center, Wolf Haven in Washington all back in the 80's

Bell: Is there any advice you would like to give to would be wildlife photographers?

Sloan: Know and respect the subjects of your photographs. Give them space, where space is due, or, where possible with captive socialized animals, gain a personal relationship. That can make all the difference in the world.