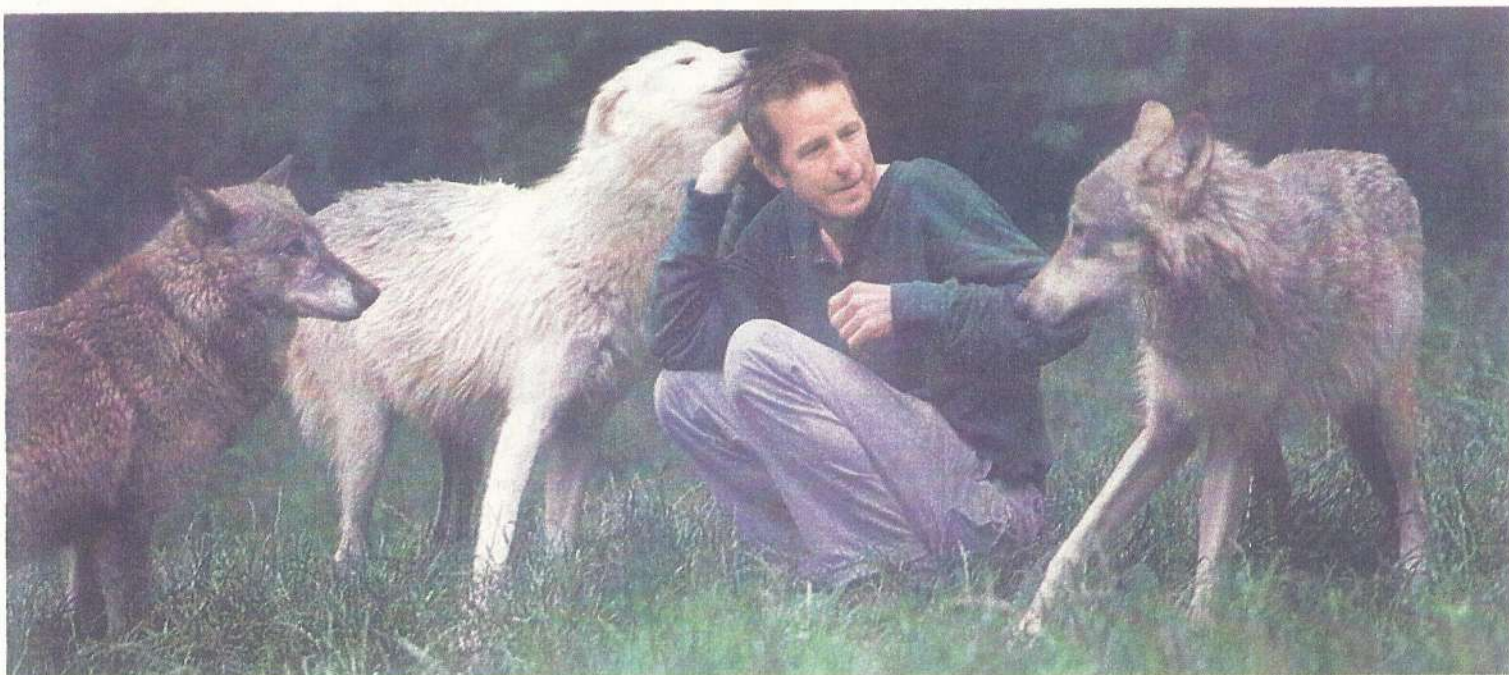


## NEWS AND TOPICS

## THE ENVIRONMENT



Photographs by Janet Durans for The New York Times

J. Henry Fair with Kaila, left, Apache and Lukas. Below: Nathan Baskin, front, Chris Pejorvich and Peter Drivas howl with inhabitants of Wolf Conservation Center.

By SAXON HENRY

## Trying to Gain Favor For a Feared Species

If You Meet a Wolf You'll Understand, a Pianist Says

**I**N 1997 Helene Grimaud, a pianist, and J. Henry Fair, a photographer, bought a six-acre parcel off Route 35 here with a plan: to create a natural habitat for wolves while promoting wolf conservation through education.

The couple chose northern Westchester for their Wolf Conservation Center for several reasons. Not only did it offer a quality environment, but South Salem is within driving distance of millions of urban school children who might visit.

Because they had acquired the proper federal and state permits, local officials supported their efforts. Ms. Grimaud said, adding that the neighbors "were fantastic." With a habitat constructed, Ms. Grimaud and Mr. Fair began acquiring wolves that were born in captivity. Kaila is a 5-year-old British Columbian female. Apache is a 3-year-old Arctic-British Columbian male, and Lukas is a 2-year-old British Columbian male. All were donated by groups approved by the federal Agriculture Department.

The support of Defenders of Wildlife, which donated \$20,000 of the \$66,000 the center has raised, has made all the difference for this private nonprofit center, Ms. Grimaud said. The center's operating budget this year is just over \$44,000.

One of the center's main objectives is to help people better understand the animals. This, they believe, will motivate the public to help protect them.

Ms. Grimaud said that meeting a wolf while she was studying animal behavior made an indelible impression.

"I guess that's one of the reasons for my belief that meeting a wolf makes a really big difference in people's minds," she said.

Mr. Fair added: "It's amazing how meeting the animals touches people. You can tell people all you want to about wolves and how they're not vicious killers, but when they come and they meet



Apache, I've seen people break down in tears."

The center puts a strong emphasis on reaching out to children, particularly those in urban schools. In the spring, Elaine Shapiro's fifth-grade class from P.S. 199 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan visited the center.

Victoria Spencer was among the students who experienced a changed perspective that day. "In fairy tales, wolves were always bad, and people would tell me, 'Oh, they are good,' and I never

believed them," she said. "Now I see they're amazing and beautiful animals."

The visit began with a slide presentation about wolves, which was followed by an opportunity to ask questions of Ms. Grimaud and Mr. Fair.

"They told us that you can't have wolves as pets because you can't tell them what to do," Jasmine Manigault, said. "They make their own choices. They're like us."

Afterward, the class moved into a special enclosure near the wolf habitat. At

one point, the entire class and all three wolves joined in a series of long, plaintive howls, which Apache would intersperse with a round of staccato barks.

Ms. Grimaud reminded the students that wolves howl to advertise when a territory is occupied.

"It could be that Apache is thinking, 'Gosh, it's a pack of humans attempting to settle in the field next to us, and there just isn't possibly enough room for all of us,'" she said, eliciting laughter.

Ms. Grimaud said the center is changing the way people view wolves.

"I've never seen someone leave with the same concerns that they showed up with," she said. "Seeing the animal demystifies them. They are in awe when they leave."

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has just completed a feasibility study to determine whether suitable habitat is available for a reintroduction of wolves into three sites in the Northeast. One of the sites is the Adirondack Park. But public sentiment may prevent the wolves from returning.

"People are afraid that wolves are going to prey on livestock, on their pets, and that they are going to be dangerous to people," Ms. Grimaud said. "It's a misconception that is based on all the old fears."

Before boarding the bus back to Manhattan, the students serenaded the wolves on small flutes, called recorders, performing a song that the group had composed for their graduation ceremony. As the students moved through the wistful notes, the wolves howled in concert.

"It was funny how the wolves 'sang' to the song," one student, Lucy Cobbs, wrote in a letter to the center. "Our graduation theme is called 'Memories in Flight.' This will be one of those memories."

A visit can be set up by sending e-mail to [visit@nywolf.org](mailto:visit@nywolf.org) or writing to Post Office Box 654, Cross River, N.Y. 10518.