Eyes On Yellowstone

A Bird's-Eye View of Wolves

(NAPSA)—Wolves are a widely studied species in Yellowstone. Since wolves were reintroduced to the park after an absence of almost 80 years, scientists spend a lot of time studying the animals' unique behavior.

"Our knowledge of wolves is vast due to decades of research around the world," said Tom Oliff, chief of natural resources. "The ability to oversee wolves in the wild has been challenging and the knowledge gained through direct observations of behavior is invaluable to understanding the species."

The best way to study wolf movement is from the air. The Raven's Eye View of Yellowstone is a component of the Aerial Eyes project that is supported by Yellowstone Park Foundation (www.ypf.org) in cooperation with Canon U.S.A. The Eyes on Yellowstone program is made possible by Canon; it provides funding and digital technology to support an array of park resource management and education programs.

Using a Canon EOS 20D digital camera body with a 100-400EF lens (f 4.5-5.6) as a scientific tool, wolf biologists Doug Smith and Dan Stahler are changing the way quantitative and qualitative wolf data are gathered and studied.

The scientists have documented various behavior—from hunting prey, to raising pups, to interacting with various species throughout the park. The details, however, remain difficult to see with the naked eye, particularly when using the routine monitoring technique of aerial radio tracking from fixed-wing aircraft flying high overhead.

A pack of wolves in Yellowstone is monitored by aircraft equipped with cameras.

The digital equipment has helped revolutionize this research. High-resolution digital photographs that can be taken several hundred feet above ground and later enhanced have, in a short time, opened new windows to studying wolf ecology and behavior.

"This is a major breakthrough for wolf research, providing first-of-its-kind results," said Stahler. "Of particular value is the identification of individual wolves and the role each plays in the pack while engaged in different activities. Determining the presence and number of pups in a litter, or whether or not a certain member of the pack is still alive, can now be readily discernable through studying photographs taken with quality digital camera equipment."

Digital photography has changed science, and it has allowed Yellowstone scientists to gather data never obtained by any other wolf research project. The combination of digital imaging and enhanced lens quality are key scientific tools to help study and understand wolves.