

I am part of a very exclusive club; one to which only a handful of people worldwide belong. I have had the privilege of working with socialised wolves. Not the scared, demoralised wolves you see in some zoos, who pace back and forth, back and forth, but those who have been reared to be comfortable around people. Wolves you can touch, and who allow you into their world: wolves who welcome interaction between our two species. A relationship between human and wild canine is unique. Their physical and mental strength is far superior to ours, making us the more vulnerable, yet, somehow, it's possible to build a friendship, gain their trust, and walk among them.

For ten years I spent time with these beautiful, powerful creatures at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust (UKWCT, or Trust) in Berkshire, England. Over the years my involvement increased as I progressed through the training to eventually become one of the senior handlers and head of the wolf welfare team. I also took on the role of education officer for four years, teaching school, college and university students about wolf behaviour. As I spent more time - not only with the wolves, but also experienced people like senior handler John Denness, and founder of the Trust Roger Palmer - I was guided and taught the difference between wolves and dogs. I spent hours with John and Roger, working with and watching the wolves, observing them through their seasonal changes, and at their daily activity peak in the crepuscular light of dawn and dusk. I nursed them

when they were sick or injured, raised abandoned neo-natal cubs, and lazed around with the adults in their enclosures. I learned to howl with them, interpret their complex communication skills, and watch how they interacted with each other and us. No part of the wolves' lives was off-limits to me; I lived, breathed, and slept wolves.

The unique insight I gained from my time at the UKWCT has enhanced my knowledge of and work with domestic dogs. I can speak with authority about the similarities and differences between wolves and dogs, dispelling myths surrounding dog training, and help others successfully interact with their canine companions.

Writing this book was a selfish act, in part. I experienced so many heart-stopping, stunning moments with the eleven wolves I worked with I don't ever want to forget them, or let time dim their memory. Included in this memoir are some of the worst times - like nursing Alba through a spinal injury, sustained in a freak accident - and also some of the very best. Simple things like the wolves howling to call me back when I drove away at the end of the day; laying in the sun with wolves sleeping a few feet from me; a wolf cub climbing into my lap to eat an apple. These are the moments in your life that define you, provide you with serenity, and sustain you through the hard times.

These memories are very, very special, and I want to share them with you.

Toni Shelbourne

*Torak,
Mosi
and Mai
playing in
the snow.*



Dakota. (l)



Mosi. (r)





*On a walk with Duma ... (l)
(By kind permission of Eve Leegwater)*

... and hanging out with Dakota in the enclosure. (r)



*Alba resting after his first swim. The damage to his left eye is evident.
(By kind permission of Greyfriars Rehabilitation Centre)*



John swimming Alba at Greyfriars Rehab Centre near Guildford, England. (l)

*Alba after his first swim: clearly tired after just a few minutes. He improved greatly over the coming months. (r)
(By kind permission of Greyfriars Rehabilitation Centre)*

All grown up, now: Torak, Mosi, and Mai playing in the snow.



Io from Wildwood Trust, Kent. All of the Wildwood wolves are related to Alba, Lunca, and Latea in some way. (r)

Apollo, father to Alba, Lunca, and Latea shortly before his death at the grand old age of sixteen. (m)
(Wildwood Trust, Kent)





Wildwood's Nadja; a shot I took when visiting to see the wolves and catch up with my friend, and Wildwood's Education Officer, Anne Riddell.