

# THE WILD ANIMAL Sanctuary

[www.WildAnimalSanctuary.org](http://www.WildAnimalSanctuary.org)

TO: Jacqui Ulrich  
Director of the Department of Conservation and Experiential Programming

RE: Rocky the Coyote

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Dear Jacqui,

Below are our responses to the questions that were put forth in your letter dated March 11, 2022.

You note that nearly a dozen coyotes currently live at The Wild Animal Sanctuary facility at Keenesburg, Colorado. What is the exact number? - 12

Do these coyotes all live in one "habitat"? If not, how are they distributed? – *We have three habitats they are spread between, with three in the first, three in the second, and six in the third.*

How large is the sole or main coyote habitat at the Keenesburg facility? – *one is ¼-acre, one is 1.5-acre, and one is 3.1-acre.*

Can you provide documentation on what and how often the coyotes are fed? – *They receive a special blend of raw meat (beef, poultry, pork and lamb) that is ground together with vitamins and minerals added. They are fed a random schedule, meaning they will be gorged for a number of days, then skip a day, then fed lightly for a day or two – then repeated in other random sequences. They usually only skip a meal one day – but most receive "treat" of meat from caretakers that hide them on off days. Regardless of the schedule, all of our animals receive more food than they can consume in a day so they never feel the need to compete.*

Are they monitored to make sure each animal has equal access to food resources? - *yes, the animal care staff monitors all food intake for each animal and the group as a whole. They notate any changes in appetites, volume consumption and eagerness to access the food. Food items are distributed within the habitats in differing manners based on the dynamics of the residents. Most resident have no issue eating side-by-side since they learn there will always be more food than they can physically consume in a day. In some cases, residents may take a piece of food to a more comfortable location, but no protective or aggressive behaviors exist.*

What materials do you use for your underground dens for coyotes? – *Both above ground, and underground dens have a base layer of wood chips with a layer of straw on top. These are checked daily and refreshed on a regular basis. Since each habitat has multiple dens, some are used regularly, while others serve as optional for times like*

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*summer when the Coyotes prefer to spread out more. All dens have open floors to natural substrate so there is no accumulation of moisture or urine.*

*How deep do they go underground, and how long is a den? – Dens vary in depth and length based on the topography of the habitat. Dens built in areas with flat ground tend to have longer tunnels leading to the den chamber due to needing to keep the angle decent to a minimum – while ones built into hillsides or sloping land will be shorter. Most dens are 2 feet underground (where the den box is situated).*

*How large is the habitat where a newly arrived coyote lives while it is isolated from other coyotes? – This depends on whether the Coyote will be introduced into an existing habitat with other Coyotes – or a new habitat without other Coyotes present. In the case of introduction within a habitat that has other Coyotes, we place a temporary cage similar to the size cage that Rocky currently lives in within the habitat so the new Coyote can acclimate and meet all of the other pack members. In the case where we build a new habitat, the new Coyote will be placed in a similar cage within the habitat for just a few days to get used to the sights and sounds, as well as establish there are no other animals living within the space.*

*Have any of the coyotes that live or have lived at the Keenesburg facility been diagnosed as imprinted by a licensed animal rehabilitator before arriving at The Wild Animal Sanctuary? – Yes, we have received Coyotes that were failed rehabilitation Coyotes who became imprinted to humans. We have also received Coyotes raised in people's homes as part of their family. In all cases, the Coyotes quickly adapted to not requesting human interaction or touch – even though it was continually offered or encouraged to help buffer their transition. Some transitioned within days, while others took a few weeks, but all began to choose independence over interactions on their own accord.*

*If so, how long did it take for a coyote or coyotes diagnosed as imprinted to “bond with other coyotes” and then live in the same enclosure? – Usually the Coyotes that were never raised around other Coyotes become curios and somewhat interested in meeting other Coyotes within a few days to a few weeks – especially after hearing the other Coyotes communicate to each other on a regular basis. The longest period we ever experienced where a human-bonded Coyote delayed their sincere interest in other Coyotes was approximately two months. This was a Coyote that came from Mexico where native Indian tribes hand-raised him, but also used him for satanic rituals. His life of being loved – but also severely tortured – caused him great mental trauma. Yet, he eventually began to love living with other rescued Coyotes and flourished as a result.*

*Has there ever been a coyote or coyotes diagnosed as imprinted that has not been able to live with other coyotes at the Keenesburg facility? – No.*

*In your letter, you assert that the coyote at River Trail “would not be in danger from the transfer or subsequent introduction to other coyotes.” From your website, it appears that the coyotes that currently live at the Keenesburg facility were either living together at a roadside zoo, or are the pups born from that set of coyotes. Has a coyote that is not from that zoo or born from a coyote from that zoo ever been introduced to this pack? – Yes, we have had three*

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*Coyotes that were hand-raised or were imprinted from Rehab facilities that have been in with one or more of the three groups we have. In one case, it was an older male Coyote that lived in a house with a family for years, and in another case it was a Coyote that had been bottle-raised by people and used for educational classes. It's important to note, with 650 rescued animals currently living at the Sanctuary or Refuge, we do not have a full-time web developer that can keep every animal's story listed, let alone keep every story up-to-date.*

*Have any of the TWAS coyotes ever been ill or injured while living at the Keenesburg facility? – Yes, we have had older Coyotes with renal issues, as well as ones with complications from previous injuries (like the tortured Coyote). Thankfully, we have an on-site hospital and full-time veterinarians to constantly monitor the animals and treat any sickness or injury immediately.*

*Have any of the TWAS coyotes ever received medication, currently or in the past? If so, what were the medical issues and what medication is or was prescribed? – Yes, see previous answer.*

*How many coyotes could be housed at the Keenesburg facility in total if it was at full capacity? – The Keenesburg facility is nearly fully built out, that is why we purchased the 9,719-acres in southern Colorado. We have Coyotes at both locations and expect to build many more Coyote habitats at the Refuge in the coming years. Depending on the number of requests we receive for Coyotes to go there, along with the number and size of each habitat we build, there could be as few as 20-30, or there could be double or triple that number. Given Coyotes are not one of the more popular species for private ownership and/or in zoo displays, it would be difficult to expect more than 10 to 20 Coyotes going there in the next decade.*

*What is the standard process for identifying and then adding a coyote or any animal to the Keenesburg facility? – All animal intake is based on numerous factors, such as the amount of space we have available, the current food resources we have, the available animal care staffing on hand, and our confidence in being able to provide any new animal(s) with a great quality of life. The Sanctuary has traditionally turned down nearly as many animals as we have agreed to take each year. This acceptance and rejection ratio demonstrates how we do not always say “yes” to every animal we are asked to take. The Sanctuary is always building new habitats for animals that haven't even been identified yet, as we realize there is usually little-to-no time available to get habitats built when an animal's life is hanging in the balance. The majority of animals we do accept are usually official confiscations – which are initiated by either a law enforcement court case, or by a personal or corporate lawsuit. In most of those cases, there is little time to prepare, so that is why we are always prepared ahead of time. In some cases, entities realize they will eventually lose ownership or possession of an animal and surrender it/them ahead of the legal battle. In those cases, we will work with the owners to transfer the animals(s) in a more cooperative manner.*

*Once an animal is identified as coming to the Sanctuary or Refuge, we work with the person or entity that has the animal to find a date and time that works for them to have us come get them. One of our teams would then travel to the location with the appropriate size truck & trailer, or van, to pick up the animal and transport them to Colorado. Normally, the current owners obtain a health certificate form their veterinarian of choice, who then sends a copy of*

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*the certificate to the Colorado State Vet's Office for review. Once that is complete, there is an Import Permit issued and we are able to carry out the physical transfer.*

Does TWAS work with the International Wildlife Rehabilitations Council for animal placement for coyotes or other animals? – *No, since there are literally tens of thousands of exotic and native animals in need of permanent placement within the United States, there are more animals than openings. As such, we work more dynamically to rescue or take in animals that are identified by animal welfare organizations as suffering or that are wards of the court. Similarly, there are hundreds of thousands of native wild-born wildlife that are euthanized each year due to human conflict, which we would not be able to help – other than the occasional case where the court system or a state wildlife agency feels it is warranted.*

Another rehabilitation organization? – *Yes, from time to time we do accept rehab animals that have special circumstances.*

How many animals in total live at Keenesburg facility? – *Approximately 550, which includes numerous smaller species such as Kit Fox, Fox, Lynx, Raccoon, Bobcat, Serval, Caracal, etc...*

Local residents who are working with TWAS to remove the coyote from River Trail Nature Center say that at TWAS, the coyote will undergo “rehabilitation.” Can you provide documentation on what constitutes the “rehabilitation” process for coyotes (or other animals) that have been diagnosed as imprinted before arriving at The Wild Animal Sanctuary? – *Yes, when we say “rehabilitate”, we are not addressing the same activities or approaches as what traditional wildlife rehabilitators do. When we say “rehabilitate” or “rehabilitation” we are referring to our own special process of enabling the natural behaviors and instincts to come out in captive wildlife. This involves admitting animals into our facility that were either hand-raised by humans, or imprinted and/or habituated toward domestic behaviors or lifestyles. We specifically address the perception these animals have of the world - as compared to what would be a more natural existence. As we stated in previous correspondence, nearly every animal we take in comes from a significantly skewed lifestyle – whether that be living in a small, cramped cage that is devoid of any natural amenities... or a domestic situation where they were raised similar to a traditional pet. Other cases involve significant starvation, abuse, overcrowding, etc... or situations where the animal(s) weren't necessarily abused or mistreated, but never lived with others of their own kind, or were denied species-specific exposure with neighboring animals. Again, whether the animals seemed comfortable or not, there is a major change that takes place when numerous aspects of their life are modified to be as close to living in the wild as possible. Their behavior, energy and social awareness increases dramatically when they are not only exposed to others of their own kind, but also when it is done in a far-more natural and free-roaming setting. As the amounts of human interface lessen when the animal(s) begin to show signs of enjoying or gravitating toward their new lifestyle, we see major improvements in the animal's confidence and natural desire for independence. Rather than being disheartened by these changes, the animals always discover many natural behaviors and relationships they greatly enjoy. We always give each animal the choice to retain human relationships and interaction, as well as the same if they were imprinted to domestic pet species, but in every case they choose to move in the direction of the more natural setting. Beyond the lifestyle and social aspects, there is a*

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*physical transformation that takes place as well. As the animals walk, run and play in much larger settings, they build significant muscle that far exceeds what they had in previously confined settings. Additionally, their senses of sight, hearing, taste and smell improve when exposed to the natural foraging and territorial defense behaviors they learn to employ in large natural habitats. So too does their muscle memory and overall coordination improve on a daily basis.*

Are there other facilities or organizations in the U.S. that “rehabilitate” imprinted animals as your organization does, in addition to TWAS? – *Yes, to some degree, as there are other sanctuaries that provide natural habitats that are larger than what has been traditionally utilized by captive wildlife facilities in the past. Of course, each case varies based on the species that is being discussed. For example, some Elephant sanctuaries provide their Elephants with habitats that may be 30-100 acres in size, while others provide thousands of acres that are completely forested and have numerous lakes for the Elephants to enjoy. When it comes to smaller mammals such as smaller exotic cats and native species of canines, there are a number that provide larger natural environments, but may, or may not, focus on the rehabilitation aspects that we just described.*

If so, can you provide their contact information? – *Turpentine Creek Wildlife Sanctuary in Arkansas – [turpentinecreek.org](http://turpentinecreek.org)*

In your letter, you wrote that the coyote at River Trail sees the presence of humans as “direct threats to his territory and general safety.” Can you provide academic research that indicates that an imprinted animal has this kind of reaction to humans? – *Listed research below – but there are literally dozens more that address this subject that can also be listed...*

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You also wrote, “The behaviors he displays are not natural and toggle between stress and boredom.” Please quantify the evidence TWAS has gathered to evaluate the coyote’s behaviors: How many hours of footage have you been provided and by whom, what were the conditions of the footage in terms of number of people present, time of day and other factors, is this continuous video or edited moments, has TWAS been provided information from any in-person evaluations by a wildlife expert, etc. – *although we understand your desire to quantify our study of Rocky’s behavior and possibly find a way to discredit the validity of our opinion, there is no need to follow through with this request. Having rescued over a thousand captive animals in 42 years, I have witnessed hundreds and hundreds of similar captive settings. In addition, there are numerous studies by Bekhoff and other scientific researchers involving captive Coyotes that back up our assertions relating to Rocky’s stress behaviors, and his boredom. If you would prefer to have one or more of these experts come to view Rocky in his enclosure during public, and non-public hours of exhibition, I am confident we can arrange this. Of course, this would be the quickest way to prove to the public that there is a problem, so I’m sure everyone who has been advocating for Rocky’s transfer would applaud that decision.*

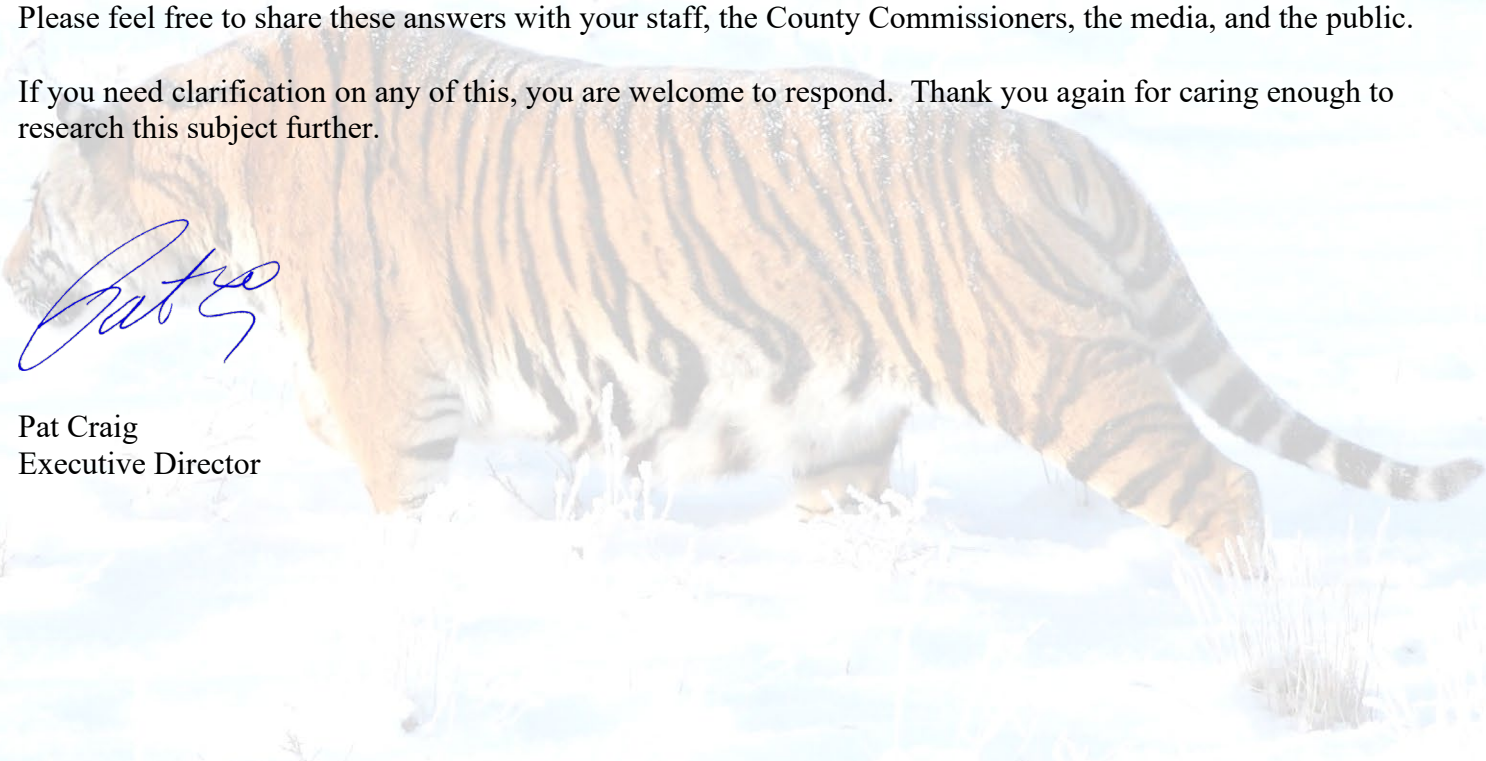
Is this the standard method TWAS uses in evaluating animal behavior? – *Absolutely.*

Please feel free to share these answers with your staff, the County Commissioners, the media, and the public.

If you need clarification on any of this, you are welcome to respond. Thank you again for caring enough to research this subject further.



Pat Craig  
Executive Director



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