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VHUP Wolf Hybrid Policy

The information following is provided to help the public understand why we no longer treat wolf hybrids. We do understand that some wolf hybrids can be wonderful pets, but there is ample evidence that this experience is not universal. We respect both dogs and wolves, and developed this policy with that respect in mind. Our foremost concerns are twofold. We want to insure that no one is inadvertently injured while treating or handling these animals because they are unaware of the manifestations of the non-domesticated or wild component. We also do not want to appear to condone the breeding or ownership of wolf hybrids, although we know that many hybrid owners have rescued these animals from abusive situations. A compromise solution would be to treat these animals, but to house them separately and treat them as exotic animals. We do not currently have a clinician in the specialty of exotic animal medicine which unfortunately precludes this choice at this time.

In Pennsylvania it is illegal to own wolves or hybrids without a permit. In New Jersey it is unlawful to own pure wolves, but not hybrids. The AVMA has a published policy that states that they do not condone and strongly discourage the breeding and ownership of wolf-hybrids. They are joined in this by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE). All these organizations recommend that wolf-hybrids not be kept as pets, and that they are not created by cross breedings. Their reasons for this involve both infectious disease considerations and behavioral, public health considerations.

First, rabies is an infectious disease that is considered epidemic in some regions in the country (the greater Philadelphia area is one such region). 31% of the rabies cases diagnosed in the United States from 1 January 1992 to 28 November 1992 came from the Mid-Atlantic States region which includes New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Wild animals are absolutely not to be vaccinated for rabies since no rabies

vaccine is licensed for use in wild animals. This rule was first created because of the use of live vaccines which provided a potent reservoir for mutation and vaccine-induced cases of the disease. The vast majority of vaccines currently used in the U.S. are inactivated, decreasing the probability of vaccine-induced rabies, but are not tested for efficacy in wild animals. These vaccines may provide a lesser degree of protection than they would in domesticated animals, giving anyone who possessed or interacted with such animals a false sense of security. This is potentially dangerous. Given this, the Compendium of Animal Rabies Control (1993) states that ..."vaccination of wildlife is not recommended.." and "hybrids (offspring of wild animals bred with domestic dogs or cats) are considered wild animals" (JAVMA, Vol. 202, No. 2, 15 January 1993: 199-204).

Furthermore, Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., vice president for Field Services of the Humane Society of the United States, a biologist with expertise in carnivore behavior and the epidemiology of dog bites, has stated in the official plat-

form for HSUS that "private ownership of wild canids and hybrids must be strongly discouraged" because of the risks to animal welfare and the risks to the safety of people, pets, and other domestic animals. He is referring both to the health risks discussed above and to the risks to the safety of individuals with whom the animals come into contact. Others with unquestionable expertise concur. The September/October 1991 issue of *Pet Veterinarian* labels wolf hybrids as a "dangerous fad." Wolf Haven, a wolf research park in Washington state, is officially, and in writing, opposed to the breeding and selling of wolf hybrids.

Reasons for the above attitudes are supported by the biology and behavior of the wolf and of the wolf hybrid. Below some highlights of wolf behavior and comparisons with that of wolf hybrids and domestic dogs are briefly outlined.

I. Physical and Exercise Capabilities and Requirements: Wolves and wolf hybrids have an exercise requirement that is not within the realm of normal for



domestic dogs: wolves routinely cover more than 30 miles per day in their annual peregrinations. They also can jump more than 6-8 feet vertically from a standing position, and can dig or tunnel equally deeply in a short time. Wolf hybrids redirect their energy to destructive behavior in the house or in pens or yards.

2. Interspecific Vocal and Non-Vocal Communication: Regardless of the postulated or stated percentage of wolf in the hybrid the fact remains that wolves have very different communicatory systems than do domestic dogs. In the process of domesticating dogs and creating breeds, humans have selected for traits that both appeal to them and are understandable because of convergence in the communicatory system. This means that expecting hybrids to behave in the same manner as domestic dogs and to believe that they communicate their intentions in the same manner is both wrong and dangerous. We expect and have encouraged through breeding dogs that bark and growl. If this is noted, most people would anticipate that some aggressive event was about to occur or was occurring. Wolves do not bark and growl; they howl in packs as long range communicatory signals. The absence of this bark and growl in hybrids could be dangerous. Wolves have not been selected to use facial signals that communicate with humans, as have domestic dogs. Hence, they show less tilting of the head, wiggling of "eyebrows", and movements of the jaws that humans, often unconsciously, use to interpret domestic dog behavior. This trait renders hybrids dangerous to humans.

3. Sociability and Protectiveness: Partly because of these communicatory traits and partly because of the socialization of wolves, wolves are shy around people. According to releases from the International Wolf Center in Minnesota, this trait is not lost and is little diminished in hybrids. The prevailing myth is that hybrids will be better at attack and protection than domestic dogs. **This is false.** Their inherent shyness makes them poor protection animals, but increases the probability that they will react inappropriately and out of context. This is

one reason that the International Wolf Center discourages breeding and ownership of hybrids.

4. Sexual Maturity and Social Systems: Wolf maturity occurs later than in domestic dogs (2-3 years v. 6 months) and can affect the manner they interact with other canids and with humans. Many domestic, pet dogs begin inappropriate aggressive behavior at social maturity. Any inappropriate aggressive propensities will be compounded in wolf hybrids because of problems interpreting their social and communicatory systems.

5. Urine Marking – Olfactory Communication: Wolf and wolf-hybrids urine mark to an extent not seen in even the most motivated domestic dog. Given that olfactory communication is such a critical component of their social system it is unreasonable to expect that humans, no matter how well intentioned, will be able to assay the effect of this on social interactions, and so will be ill equipped to deal with changes in social status or with olfactory statements by the wolf or wolf hybrid.

6. Predatory Behavior: Hybrids retain components of wolf predatory behavior to varying degrees. The silent, stealth-like communication discussed above is one component of this. Another is the willingness to track and pounce upon small, erratically behaving, vocalizing individuals. This latter scenario defines small children. Predatory pet dogs (which do occur), wolves, and wolf hybrids will all respond to such individuals by pouncing and biting. When pet, domestic dogs behave in this manner it is considered out of context, inappropriate behavior because we have selected these animals, through breeding in domestication programs over a period of 12,000 years, to recognize any human as a non-prey item. This is obviously not true for wolves, who should have been subject to no human intervention, nor can it be true for wolf hybrids, who have been subject to no rigorous breeding program that would decrease predatory tendencies. The extent to which these predatory instincts are so easily triggered in wolf hybrids, in a manner that appears out of context, makes them particularly danger-

ous in unsupervised situations where children are present. In addition, the jaw and musculature configuration of wolves and wolf hybrids differs from that of domestic, pet dogs. The former have more powerful jaws and are liable to do more damage during the initial bite. This renders them particularly risky for small children.

7. Genetic Conservation of the Wolf: Finally, some proponents of wolf hybrids maintain that hybrids are a way of saving the wolf as a species by maintaining the genetic stock. This is an unfounded and mistaken statement that perpetuates a view that is wrong and dangerous.

VHUP Hospital Board



Ophthalmology Equipment to Arrive Soon

The Section of Ophthalmology at VHUP is purchasing two new pieces of equipment for dogs and cats with ocular problems. The equipment is made possible through the generosity of the Devon Dog Show Association, the Kennel Club of Philadelphia, Montgomery County Kennel Club, Bucks County Kennel Club, Harboro Dog Club, Ms. K. Carol Carlson, and Dr. Felix Gzemskii.

The electroretinography (ERG) machine is an important diagnostic tool to determine the viability of the retina, as well as identify potential inherited genetic defects, prior to cataract surgery. The phaco-emulsification surgery unit, by breaking up a cataract into fragments, allows for a very small incision, thereby minimizing inflammation and irritation following surgery; vision is restored almost immediately. Both machines are slated to arrive shortly.