



This story will expire on 12/10/2006. After that, it will be available only in Archive Tulsa, the tulsaworld.com archive service.

Instinct for survival

By ROD WALTON World Staff Writer
11/10/2006

[View in Print \(PDF\) Format](#)

BA wildlife refuge struggles on after devastating poisonings

BROKEN ARROW -- For an alpha-male Canadian timber wolf, Riggs sure played a lot like a 12-year-old lap dog Thursday. He treated strangers like old friends in his cage, lying down peaceably while the visitors scratched his ears, head and belly.

Riggs might be friendly, but he's a lonelier wolf these days.

Only a few feet away, just outside his cage, sits a box containing the ashes of one of his pack mates at Safari's Interactive Animal Sanctuary. Raven, a female, was one of three wolves who are suspected of being poisoned to death in the last month.

"There are no fences where you now roam," reads a plaque next to the box of ashes. "Run free and wild and fill the heaven with your soulful song."

Safari's human handlers have been in mourning themselves over the last month. They are certain that trespassers threw poisoned meat over the wolves' fences and killed at least three. The two other deaths earlier this year are under suspicion.

"It's a nightmare," Safari's president and founder, Lori Ensign, said during a special media tour of the sanctuary Thursday. "For 11 years, we haven't had a problem."

Now Ensign must spend thousands

of dollars more to keep malevolent strangers out. The sanctuary is installing lighting, higher fencing and other security measures designed to protect the animals -- which include everything from raccoons to bears at the hilly 12-acre site.

Safari's and its supporters also are offering a \$1,200 reward for information leading to an arrest in the October killings.



Lori Ensign, president and founder of Safari's Interactive Animal Sanctuary in Broken Arrow, pets 12-year-old Riggs, one of seven wolves at the sanctuary. MICHAEL WYKE / Tulsa World



Click on a thumbnail above to view photos.

Tulsa World Features



Today's Tulsa World

PDF Format

Requires Adobe Acrobat




Subscribe

Archives


Business / Finance

Stock Ticker

Classifieds

 Vehicles

 Jobs

 Real Estate

Columnists

Communities

Calendars

Entertainment Spot

Movie Listings

Movie Reviews

Music

Lifestyle Scenes

Book Scene

Education Scene

Family Scene

Food Scene

Health Scene

Home & Garden

Scene

Recipes & Cooking

Religion Scene

Social Scene

Style Scene

Travel Scene

Satellite Teens

Lotteries

News

Action Line

Flight Info

Photojournalism

The New Iraq

Opinion

Polls

Resource Links

Newspaper in Education

Sports

Traffic & Construction

Transitions

Births

Death Notices

Obituaries

Divorces

Marriages &

Anniversaries

Celebrations -

Announcement Forms

Weather

Lobo, a female gray timber wolf, was the first Safari's animal to test positive for the poisoning. She died Oct. 11 after being found sick in her pen one day earlier.

"We had her out at a school rr day on a Monday," Ensign recalled. "Wednesday she was dead."

Raven was euthanized at a Tulsa animal hospital only weeks later. Safari's experts said the "alpha" animals were the ones to get sick because they always got to the meat first.

The sanctuary now has seven wolves. One is Sasha, a 15-year-old male who survived poisoning but now simply lies in his enclosure. Myatuk, a 3-year-old son of Lobo's, paced restively in another cage.

The sanctuary's staff members are looking for answers.

"That's what we want to know," said Heather Lawson, 23, who has volunteered at the sanctuary since she was 11. "What have these animals done to them?"

Ensign, a wildlife rescuer, opened the sanctuary in 1995. Safari's is open to the public and relies on donations and visitor's fees for its operating costs.

The refuge, at 26881 E. 58th St., is in the Wagoner County portion of Broken Arrow.

Safari's can no longer accept donated meat because of the poison scare, Ensign said. She used to bring in deer harvested by hunters throughout the season.

The donated meat was always appreciated -- wolves eat at least 2 1/2 to 5 pounds of beef much of the time, up to 10 pounds per day in the winter, experts said.

"It's killed us," Ensign added, noting that the hunters' donations "saved us \$3,000 a month. But it's not worth taking the chance."

Investigators are still waiting on toxicology results to determine what kind of poison was used to kill the wolves, authorities said.

"This is definitely malicious," said Dr. Dan Danner, a veterinarian who treated the dying wolves. He noted that footprints were discovered along the north fencing that borders the animals' enclosure.

Ensign said the killings are devastating to her and other sanctuary regulars.

She considers her operation a wildlife refuge. She takes in animals when their owners can no longer keep them.

"These aren't vicious killers, as you've seen. They're loving creatures," she said. "Why hurt them?"

Web site: www.safarissanctuary.org

Rod Walton 581-8457

rod.walton@tulsaworld.com

Safari's sanctuary

The sanctuary is open from noon to 5 p.m. weekends and by appointment weekdays.

Anyone with information about the wolf poisonings or who wants to make a donation or inquire about visiting the sanctuary can call 357-5683.

[View in Print \(PDF\) Format](#)

 [Respond to this Story](#)

TULSA WORLD

[About Tulsa World](#) | [Advertise: Online or Print](#) | [Carrier Application](#) | [Delivery Inquiries](#)
[Subscribe](#) | [Recycling](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Usage](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#)
Copyright © 2006 , World Publishing Co. All rights reserved.