



It's early afternoon and we're standing in the **ghostly light** of a **tall pine forest**, preparing to meet some of the **planet's rarest canines**. This wildlife refuge is home to five **captive red wolves**, living here as part of a **breeding programme**. "Should we be nervous?" we ask biologist **Joe Madison** (left) from the **Red Wolf Recovery Programme**, as he ushers us into a large outdoor pen.



Going, going...



... gone into the wild!

FIRST GLANCE

"There's **never** been a recorded attack by a red wolf on a person," Joe reassures us, as he clicks the gate shut behind him. "They want to stay as **far away from people** as possible, see?" On the far side of the pen, we can just make out a **tawny-coloured** red wolf (left). She paces excitedly but doesn't come any closer. She's beautiful.



The sweet, skittish female stays well away from people

BIG BAD WOLVES?

"We get **frustrated** because red wolves are **portrayed in the media** as **vicious killers**," says Joe. "But in the last **30 years**, there have been just **seven** confirmed attacks on **livestock**, and only on smaller animals like **goats** and **chickens**. Sadly, red wolves' **false reputation** as a **threat to humans and livestock** led to people shooting them. Eventually, **hunting**, combined with **habitat loss**,

pushed them to the verge of extinction." So, how were the species saved?

RED WOLF RESCUE

"In 1980, the **one remaining population** of red wolves was **taken out of the wild and into captivity**," he explains. "That way, they could be **protected**, and a **captive breeding programme** could begin." But after the last wolves had been collected, conservationists realised the situation was **even worse** than they'd feared – of the **400 animals** that were rounded up, **only 14** were actually **healthy red wolves**! The others were either **coyotes** that had been **mistakenly caught**, **red wolf and coyote hybrids** or red wolves that were **too old** or **too ill to have babies**. All the red wolves that exist today are **offspring of those 14** remaining individuals.



People sometimes mistake coyotes for red wolves!

CALL OF THE WILD

The **captive breeding programme** was a success and the red wolves' numbers increased – it was soon time to **reintroduce** some of the captive wolves to the wild. Hooray! In **1987**, **four pairs** were released into the 810km² **Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge**. Located on a **peninsula** (a long strip of land surrounded by water), it was the perfect, safe habitat. At their height there were around **130 red wolves** in the wild.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

The wild wolves were doing well until the **mid-1990s** when a new problem arrived – **coyotes**. A population of the **canines** had moved into the area and they began causing trouble for landowners, who feared they would **attack small livestock, game animals and pets**. Unless you **know what to look for** (see below, right), coyotes can **seem similar to red wolves**. People began shooting the pesky coyotes – but many **red wolves were also killed in error**. Tragically, today there are just **30-35 red wolves** remaining in the wild.

THE FUTURE

Joe and his team at the **Red Wolf Recovery Programme** are working hard to make sure the red wolf population stays as stable as possible. They use a variety of techniques – including **radio collars** and **remote sensing cameras** – to monitor the wild wolves. They also **microchip pups** soon after they're born. There are now **244 captive red wolves** in **breeding centres** around the USA – and Joe wants to increase their number to **400**,

- so they can create a **second release site** somewhere else in the country.
- Joe's hoping that these charming canines could one day be howling right across the USA once again!



A captive-born red wolf gets ready for release

NG Kids travelled to **North Carolina** courtesy of **America As You Like It** (americaasyoulikeit.com). They run a **two-week holiday** to North Carolina from **£6235** for a family of four (two adults, and two children 2-11yrs), including **return flights on American Airlines** to Raleigh-Durham, **14 days' fully inclusive car hire**, one night at the **Holiday Inn Express Airport-Brier Creek** in Raleigh, three nights at the **Ramada Plaza by Wyndham on Nags Head oceanfront**, three nights at the **Anchorage Inn in Ocracoke** and seven nights' self-catering in a three-bedroom home at **Topsail Beach**. Find out more about North Carolina at visitnc.com

One technique used by Joe's team to boost numbers in the wild is **pup fostering**. Pups **born in captivity** are **raised in dens of wild red wolves** with other pups. The mother raises them as if **they are her own!**



Wild wolf pups are **microchipped** when they're ten days old (left). When they're older, researchers put **radio collars** on them (right).



WHICH WOLF?

Here's how to tell the difference between **red wolves** and their **canine cousins**, the **grey wolf** and the **coyote**...

APPEARANCE

SIZE

FAMILY LIFE

DIET

COYOTE	RED WOLF	GREY WOLF
Similar tawny colouring to red wolves, but narrower muzzles and pointy ears .	Often the fur behind their legs and ears will have a reddish tint .	Long bushy black-tipped tails and thick grey fur . There are pure white and all black variations.
At 1.3m long , coyotes are smaller than reds, weighing just 11-16kg .	Weighing 20-36kg , reds can grow up to 1.7m in length .	Much heavier (26-60kg), greys are 2m in length .
Although coyotes live in family groups, they usually travel and hunt alone or in loose pairs.	Family groups are smaller, with 4-6 individuals – usually the breeding pair and their young from the previous two years.	Live in large packs of 10-15 members , led by an alpha male and an alpha female. Members often come and go.
Any small animal they can find – from calves and squirrels to insects . Will eat fruits and vegetables in the winter.	White-tailed deer are their most common prey, plus smaller animals such as raccoons, rabbits and rodents .	Mostly eat large prey such as moose, goats, sheep and deer . Will also eat smaller animals like beavers or hares .