Wolf euthanized after Banff camper attacked in tent

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A wolf in Banff National Park. Mike Drew / Calgary Sun archives

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A wolf was euthanized after attacking a camper early Friday morning in Banff National park, in what federal officials and a wildlife biologist call an unusual incident.

The camper was inside a tent at Rampart Creek campground on the Icefields Parkway when the attack happened around 1 a.m.

The camper's hand and arm were injured. After reporting the incident, the camper was transferred to hospital.

Parks Canada said in a statement that no significant wildlife attractants or food were found inside the tent or the immediate vicinity.

The wolf believed to be involved was found about one kilometre south of the campground, which was closed pending an investigation.

"Incidents like these are very rare," Parks Canada stated. "Visitor safety is of the utmost importance for Parks Canada . . . Parks Canada continues to monitor wildlife activity in the area and will take further steps if necessary, however this appears to be an isolated incident."

An Alberta-biologist said he was extremely surprised to hear of the incident, saying wolves typically shy away from humans.

“It’s quite unusual; it would be the first such case I’ve heard of (in Alberta) of wolves being so aggressive,” said Dr. Gilbert Proulx of Alberta Wildlife Research Management Ltd.

While researching caribou, Proulx said he frequently came within close range of wolves that would prove more curious than aggressive.

“They would be within 10 feet away and then go,” he said.

The wolf involved in Friday’s incident should be examined for rabies, which would diminish the animal’s fear of humans, he said.

Any possible habituation from earlier human contact should also be considered, said Proulx.

Last year, several wolves from a Banff National Park pack were put down by federal officials after becoming aggressive with campers and getting into food and garbage left at campsites.

Parks Canada issued a warning to visitors last September after a lone wolf had shown aggression to humans at a campground near Banff townsite.

“If you feed them, you’re asking for trouble,” said Proulx.

He noted there have been some serious wolf attacks on humans in northern Saskatchewan in recent years.

In late 2005, Ontario geology student Kenton Carnegie was killed by wolves near a mining supply camp at Points North Landing, Sask., when he went for a walk alone.

Two other wolf attacks in that province since 2004 left two men injured, the most recent in 2016.

Some of the attacks raised concerns about the presence of garbage as attractants.

Proulx said he hopes the most recent incident doesn’t lead to an exaggerated fear of wolves or to their demonization.

“It would be bad if all wolves got painted with the same colour,” he said.

Parks Canada asked that all park users practice safe camping practices, obey all camping regulations and keep food and garbage secure at all times. Wildlife sightings can be reported to Banff dispatch at 403-762-1473.

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