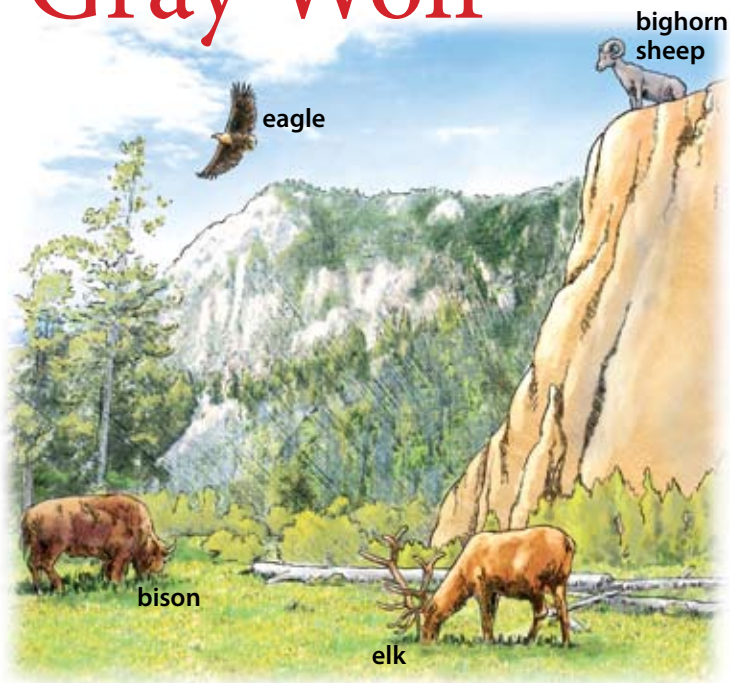


Return of the Gray Wolf



Yellowstone National Park in the United States is one of the most beautiful places in the world. In the park, visitors see many kinds of wildlife like **bison**, **elk**, and **bighorn sheep** in their natural environment. But for many years, one animal was missing: the gray wolf. These wolves still lived in Canada, but they were disappearing in the United States.

Wolves are very intelligent animals. They learn, play, and live in families—the same way dogs do. They communicate with the other wolves in their pack, or family, with their voices. They kill their prey with their sharp teeth. When wolves are together in their packs, they hunt very large animals like bison.

Starting in the 1800s, people hunted gray wolves in Yellowstone because they were dangerous predators. In 1926, the last wolf in the park was killed. But some scientists thought that this was bad for the ecosystem. If there are no predators, the population of prey animals

gets too large. In 1976, the government made it illegal to kill wolves. And in 1995, scientists started a new program. They brought 31 wolves from Canada to live in Yellowstone.

Some people were very angry about this program. Tourists were afraid of wolf attacks, though wolves don't usually hurt people. Ranch owners don't like wolves because they kill their sheep and cows. In the first few years, wolves killed 80 sheep and 5 cows near the park. Scientists say that was only a few animals, but ranchers say it was too many.

The wolves in Yellowstone have helped the park's ecology. If wolves kill an elk, they will leave a lot of meat for other animals, because an elk is too big for wolves to eat completely. So the wolves give food to animals and birds like **eagles**. The wolves also helped the trees. If there are no wolves, there will be too many elk. The elk won't have enough food, so they eat small willow trees and kill some kinds of forests. After the wolves came back to the park, they killed and ate the elk, and the willow trees started to grow again.

Today, there are more than 1,000 gray wolves around Yellowstone. And once again, you can hear their voices at night.

