

Seeking out the wolf packs of Parc national du Mont-Tremblant

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The immensity of the landscapes of Parc national du Mont-Tremblant has always attracted visitors. However, a new interest emerged in 2006. The park's emblematic species, the wolf (*Canis lupus*), caught visitors' attention and gave rise to numerous discussions. In many respects, 2006 was the year of the wolf! Indeed, in addition to adorning the cover page of the *Park newsletter*, this enigmatic member of the canidae family was observed on countless occasions both by park visitors and employees. These sightings led visitors to ask numerous questions often taking the following form: "*But where do these wolves hiding in the dark or peering out of the undergrowth along roads and in other locations come from?*"

Steps were taken to intensify the program to acquire knowledge about the park's wolf packs. Having as a basic premise that five wolf packs are spread out over the entire territory (Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Faune, 1996), we decided to proceed with several studies. Each year, we make a compilation of wildlife observations. A monitoring of the movements of the Lac-des-Sables pack has been under way since 2001. On this subject, it is worth mentioning that sampling sites are regularly marked by the passage of one to four specimens. The analysis of the data indicated fewer movements during the 2003 season. However, the situation stabilized from 2004 to 2006. The frequency of tracks even increased in comparison with 2001-2002.

In 2006, the park implemented a new annual survey program. The methodology is based on the principle of "calling packs". While Parcs Québec has adopted a code of ethics which does not authorize wolf calls during discovery activities, this method, and limited and clearly defined within the context of a scientific research protocol, is authorized.

The territory was divided into several listening stations 6 to 10 km apart. Knowing that under ideal weather conditions the howl of a wolf can have a range of 2 to 5 km, researchers consider that almost the entire surface area of the park was covered. During two outings in September, out of 18 stations, six of our calls were answered, only one of which originated from a group (likely made up of three adults and three or four young wolves). Based on their origin and their approximate distance, two of the five responses (coming from lone wolves) heard at two adjacent stations may have originated from the same wolf. Consequently, four lone wolves actually answered our calls. A few minor adjustments were made to the methodology to ensure that future surveys unfold smoothly.

It is important to locate packs and learn more about the wolf at Parc national du Mont-Tremblant. This new knowledge will allow us to better protect the species as well as enrich the content of the discovery activities. Who knows? It may be one day possible to find oneself in the company of a wolf pack of Parc national du Mont-Tremblant by way of a multimedia exhibit combining sounds and images...

