

# What you need to know about wolf-dog hybrids

By Alexandra Semyonova

## Introduction

It's clear from all statistics that wolf-dog hybrids present a severely heightened risk for infants and young children. Some people are indifferent to this fact, claiming that the main issue is animal welfare or consumer freedom. In light of these emotional arguments, it's important to understand that the breeding of these hybrids is a serious problem for wolves, dogs and the hybrids too. Literally the only purposes served by breeding hybrids are the fleeting vanity of a casual consumer and the financial interests of breeders. This breeding is bad for all other parties involved, both animal and human.

It's not easy to get a grip on the whole issue. There are a lot of myths and fairy tales floating around about wolves, dogs and wolf-dog hybrids. What little accurate information there is, is fragmented and hard to access. Whether you are a consumer looking for a pet or a lawmaker considering legislation, it is important that you make an informed and intelligent choice rather than one based on emotion, fantasy, advertising or financially biased lobbies. This document is intended to line up some real biological, behavioral, ecological and social facts, gathering the fragmented truths into a view of the bigger picture.

## Origins of the two species

The dog and the wolf are related because they share an ancient ancestor. The two branches began to diverge at least 50,000 years ago, when our own species began to develop [modern behavior](#). The ancestral branch that would become the modern wolf kept its fear of humans and continued to hunt for a living. Natural selection made sure this branch kept all the emotions, reflexes and skills necessary to survive hunting in the wild. The branch that would become the domestic dog discovered that it could make an easier, safer living by trailing behind our nomadic ancestors and scavenging our waste piles. Natural selection made sure that only the less shy animals -- ones who dared be near humans and their scent -- could exploit this new food source. Human selection also played a role, because our ancestors had no qualms about killing any animal they felt threatened or even bothered by. **More and more research shows that the domestic dog did not descend from the wolf. Rather, they are two separate species that share a prehistoric ancestor.**

## Domestication

Domestication is more complicated than raising a wild animal from infancy in a human camp or home, since that doesn't change the animal's brain, anatomy, or genes. At the end of the juvenile period, adult behavior will begin to emerge, and it becomes impossible to safely keep the animal in a human home. The pre-dog was only able to join us because so many [genetic changes](#) had already taken place long before it began to actually mingle with us.

How did this happen? When the pre-dog lost its fear of approaching us, this led to it undergoing human selection. By killing off any that came close in a way that scared or even just annoyed us, we started the long process of domesticating the pre-dog. Remember, only the ones we found tolerable were allowed to live, thus to reproduce. This changes a gene pool. In the end, our selective actions resulted in an animal with a smaller and differently structured brain. In the new ecological niche, the dog's brain could dispense with all kinds of now superfluous sensitivities and behavioral routines, many of which actually decreased the chances of survival near humans. As a result, the dog became less aggressive and more tractable. Its agonistic behavior (both defensive and offensive) is much milder. The threshold for attack is much higher. It has lessened sensory sharpness, dampened emotional reactions, less curiosity and motivational drive, and diminished problem solving capacity. It has an extended socialization period, and a predisposition to be oriented to humans and able to learn human cues.

These are genetically determined traits all domesticated animals share relative to their wild cousins. You don't get them just by raising a wild baby animal. It was only after all these changes in the gene pool, thus in inherent behavior had taken place that we could raise doggy pups close in our camps and homes that were still safe to have around when they reached adulthood. The changes in the dog's body followed around 12,500 years ago, when we had our first agricultural revolution. We stopped wandering. The dog already had a brain that made it fit to be near us. Now the dog no longer needed the body of a wide-ranging canid. The fully domestic dog was a fact. Both its body and its brain were superbly adapted to life in close quarters with humans.

The wolf was not turned into the domestic dog by people stealing / rescuing wolf puppies. Genetics make this impossible. The dog's ancestor started domesticating itself by wanting to be near us as an easier food source. Then millennia of human selection made this pre-dog into a different creature, a species with its own gene pool. Only after this long process had taken place could we live more closely with this canid, even raising its puppies and keeping it in our homes.

### **Differences between the present-day wolf and the modern domestic dog**

The **wolf** has retained the emotions, instincts, reflexes, senses, behaviors and anatomy that make it fit for life as a wild hunter. It is a restless wanderer, covering ranges sometimes up to tens of miles. The wolf is obsessive about knowing its range well, since every unfamiliar thing can be or signal a danger to it. The wolf is *neophobic* -- afraid of novel things, including non-familiar wolves. And indeed, the wolf lives in a closed family group that only rarely admits a stranger. Wolves will chase off and sometimes kill any unknown wolf that wanders onto their range. This fear of and hostility towards strangers even of their own species leads wolves to clearly mark (and frequently re-mark) their territory. This is not dominance; it's an instrument of conflict avoidance. It warns others that the range is occupied, so that all can avoid possibly injurious fights. Conflicts within the group are usually solved with signaling and ritual aggression, though a group can also arbitrarily decide to expel a member or kill it if it doesn't leave. Although wolves will only go out hunting when they need food, never for mere energy-wasting sport, they will reflexively react if an easy prey comes within reach. **Humans are irrelevant in the world of the wolf except for the threat we represent to it. None of its faculties are adapted to interacting with us as friends.**

The **dog** had to lose the wolf's intense neophobia in order to exploit the new food source humans opened up. It had to be able to come within sight of strangers of various species without fleeing or attacking. Humans killed pre-dogs that seemed threatening to them. This human selection against aggression resulted in an animal with a high threshold for the use of serious aggression, coupled with an extensive set of warning signals before the animal would resort even to biting (let alone attack). As long as it was predictable, thus avoidable, humans tolerated the low level of also relatively rare aggression the domestic dog might sometimes have displayed. Humans also easily killed any animal that annoyed them too much, so there was selection for an animal with less curiosity and dampened emotional reactions, one that would prefer to stay in the background, content to spend much of its time just observing events or sleeping.

It's important to note here that none of these changes mean a dulling down to 'inferiority'. These are highly functional changes. A big brain is expensive in terms of energy; so are unnecessary reactivity and alertness. By dumping the excess baggage and becoming 25 - 30% smaller than a wolf's brain (relative to body weight), the dog's brain increased its energy efficiency and thus its behavioral and Darwinian fitness for the niche it was moving into. These changes also enabled the dog to live *happily* in the human niche. An animal that lives with us has to endure long periods of boredom without feeling this as a deprivation or even a torture. It has to have lost a number of the spinal-mediated behavioral subroutines that a wild animal needs -- both the flight response that generates chronic stress around humans and the fight response that puts us in danger when activated, even in something so small as a rat. In the case of the canids, loss of the reflexive predatory subroutine is crucial if it is to live with our children, livestock and other pets.

Once it was safely interacting closely with us, the dogs that most delighted us, that felt the most like friends to us, were the ones that got to breed. All of this resulted in an animal that is finely honed to read and respond to us, to communicate with us, and to be what we want or need it to be. **Humans were and still are *the* relevant environmental factor in the world of the domestic dog. All of its faculties are adapted to interacting with us as at least possible friends.**

### **Socialization, habituation to humans, training**

'Socializing' a **wolf** pup to humans isn't easy. You have to do this during the eighth through the nineteenth days of its life (ie, before its ears and eyes open). You have to prevent contact with any other wolves during that time, including mother and siblings. You have to keep it in contact with your body 24/7 during those eleven days. After that, you can allow contact with mother and siblings again. Now you have only a couple of weeks to habituate the wolf pup to other humans, because the wolf's strong fight/flight trait develops rapidly after its nineteenth day. This process reduces the wolf's neophobia, but the fear of unfamiliar things remains extreme. The wolf will remain wary of humans it hasn't known all its life, and it will still be dangerous for us in a captive situation. People who work with 'socialized' captive wolves remain careful about how they interact with the wolves that know them, never attempting 'dominance', always backing down if the wolf signals to do so, and never turning their back on the adult wolves. These adult 'human-socialized' wolves remain frightened by new things, new sounds, and people they don't

know. Even a hand-raised wolf never sees us -- nor any of the animals we keep -- as co-wolves or part of their family. It doesn't attach to us the way a dog does. The use of the word 'socialization' is confusing to the public, since it suggests that it can produce the same results as what we call socialization of a domestic dog puppy. This is not the case. **A 'socialized' wolf does not grow up to be a domestic dog. It remains a wild animal, just one that has learned to tolerate some humans near it. 'Habituation' would be a more accurate term to use -- an animal gets used to a thing it fears or detests, enough that it can tolerate that thing in its surroundings.**

If a wolf hasn't been raised this way from birth, it is practically impossible to habituate it to humans.

The **domestic dog** pup only needs ninety minutes of handling during its fourth through seventh week to see humans as a normal part of its world. With some twenty minutes of handling each day during its first twelve weeks, the pup can learn to see humans as a desirable part of its world, part of a delightful social family it inhabits. With the right methods, this window can be extended to about sixteen weeks. This socialization doesn't require isolation from other dogs. In fact, contact with other dogs is important to teach the pup many of the social skills it will need to master for good contact with us. During the twelve to sixteen week socialization period, a dog can also learn to see other animals as part of the social family it belongs to. **The term socialization really does apply to the domestic dog. The dog doesn't just habituate to us; it easily learns to see us as the central, most delightful point its social world revolves around. It doesn't just tolerate us, it is genetically predisposed to actually learn to love us.**

Socialization does not change what an animal is. Socialization of all animals, including wolves, dogs and humans, can only have effect within genetically determined parameters.

The same goes for training. Each species has its own inherent sense and attention structures, motor patterns and behaviors. Even a good trainer can't train a wolf to do things she's got a dog doing within a few minutes. This is because even stimulus-response can only develop, but not change, genetic potential and boundaries. Inherent motor patterns and instinctive behaviors remain intact, though temporarily suppressed. Even if training seems to succeed, the animal will soon drift back into various species-specific behaviors.

## **Hybrids**

Now you have a picture of the two contradictory worlds breeders are mixing when they mate a wolf with a dog. By advertising 'high' or 'low content' wolf in their mixes, the breeders suggest that they have control over how much the animals will behave like a wolf or like a dog. This isn't true. Even in a 50-50 mating, breeders can have no idea which specific genes are being passed on to the offspring from each parent. Down the line, a hybrid that is supposedly only 10% or 25% wolf can turn out have exactly the most unfortunate of the wolf genes in that smaller percent. For example, a so-called ten-percenter can turn out to have inherited lots of dog friendliness and trainability, but also the motivation and reflexes that make it that make it escape, kill small animals and unfamiliar dogs, and react to a human infant as if that infant were a delicious, bleating baby lamb.

And so wolf-dog hybrids are always highly unpredictable. Some will be easier to habituate to humans than others, but you can't tell by looking at them or counting gene percentages. Most

are timid towards humans. Some will be deathly scared of all new things, including visitors (or even new furniture) in your home. Because they'd rather silently flee when they see an unfamiliar human or hear an unfamiliar noise, they are not good watchdogs or even alarm dogs. They are difficult, sometimes impossible, to housetrain because they have the wolf's obsession with frequently marking their living area. There is always the risk of sudden, severe aggression, even towards an owner. Given their jaw strength, even what is intended as a corrective or defensive -- not a mangling or killing -- bite can inflict serious or even fatal damage on a human. Hybrids are generally difficult to train, and of course behavioral drift then takes place. With the wolf's curiosity, they are often destructive in the home. They will follow you around all day, curious what you're doing and wanting attention -- and some of these seemingly attached hybrids have suddenly attacked the owner they were so fond of. They often can't be left alone at home, destroying the furniture or the walls while you're gone, or else trying to get out to find you. They are bored and unhappy when confined, even if you're at home, so they become escape artists. They don't hesitate to kill small animals they run into. They often kill other people's dogs, sometimes even dogs they know well in their own homes.

Think about what this means. If you do what's necessary to make keeping a hybrid bearable for yourself and safe for your neighborhood -- mostly confining and isolating it -- the hybrid will be living an unhappy life, despite the huge amount of work it means for you and even if you manage to keep it up for ten or twelve years. If you don't do these things -- confine and isolate -- you are putting yourself, your guests and neighbors, other pets, and your own children at risk. Even if you do your best, a small mistake or oversight can result in tragedy. In reality, the weird mix of behaviors hybridization yields means that most people can't deal with it after awhile. Some people chain the thing in the back yard and more or less forget it exists except at feeding time. Imagine what this means to a social, intelligent, group-living animal, whose genes are telling it to roam and explore then return to the group. The vast majority of people who start on this fantasy trip end up dumping their hybrid altogether before its third birthday. A few find space at a specialized sanctuary, where the animal can live out its life. The vast majority are dumped in the countryside, where they are doomed to starve, be shot by a farmer or rancher, or die hit by a car.

As we consider the unhappiness of most hybrids and their owners, we shouldn't forget the other misery that's behind the birth of these hybrids. Many of the breeding facilities are back yard breeders or puppy mills. This means that at least one wolf and possibly many dogs are being kept under unhappy, often dismal conditions in order to supply the market with fashion-accessory puppies. Wolf-dog matings rarely occur spontaneously, because there are huge behavioral barriers between the two species. This means that many, if not most, hybrids are the result of a forced mating.

### **True tales about keeping hybrids**

The Dogsbite.org archive [tracks fatal attacks](#) by wolf-dog hybrids, with as full a background story as it can find. Merritt Clifton of Animals24/7.org tracks both fatal and maiming attacks as a -- very useful -- numbers sheet, but with only some of the back stories. These statistics and stories illuminate the most dire consequences of keeping wolf-dog hybrids, but they don't tell us about

attacks not damaging enough to make the news, about narrow escapes from catastrophe, or about the deaths inflicted on other animals; nor do they give a picture of what daily life is like with one or more hybrids.

This information is not easy to find, for various reasons. This [blog post](#) provides a picture of how the owners of these animals can be in denial of the real situation. Commercial interests (and often ignorance) prevent breeders from being honest. Fan clubs exert pressure on social media to suppress negative stories on pain of a storm of outrage and blame. As a result, we find the most frank accounts of what it is to live with hybrids in a couple of books written before all these pressures came to bear.

During the 1950s Lois Crisler (1896 - 1971) spent eight years breeding hybrids, in the hope that their company would keep her captive female wolf happy. Crisler did this on a large, fenced piece of land, isolated in rural Colorado. In 1968, she published a [book](#), *Captive Wild*, telling the story of her life with hybrids. Here are some of her notes:

- Even in 50-50 pups, Crisler couldn't tell which would behave more like a wolf or more like a dog. Whether an animal looked more like a wolf or a dog gave no clue to how its behavior would be.
- The wolf killed dog puppies if she could get to them or they wandered within reach of her. The wolf and the hybrids all killed any dog they didn't like. Crisler spent a lot of time trying to keep antagonistic parties separated, but didn't always succeed. Some of the hybrids were safe with puppies, some weren't.
- The hybrid pups were willing, at the age of 8 weeks already, to fight with the mother if she tried to move or correct them.
- Crisler devoted much of her time during the eight years to trying to prevent the wolf and hybrids from getting out. She admits to herself that this indicates the animals aren't happy even with such a large piece of land to live on. In the course of the eight years, she several times decides she has to put down hybrids that are escaping too often.
- Despite the fact that they knew her intimately from their puppy days, most of Crisler's hybrids wouldn't let her touch them. None of them attached to her the way a dog would.
- They were all neophobic and would flee, silently, in terror at the sound of an unknown car approaching the estate, hiding in the farthest corners they could find.
- At the age of 20 months, two of the hybrids start to show predatory behavior towards Crisler. One day she was greeting the wolf mother, then (p. 148): "When I moved away, they started to chivy me, [the male] in front, [the female] trying to keep back of me. Her eyes were sparkling, his were cold and lightless. If I had stumbled as I backed up the steep hard bank onto the plaza with the pair baiting me, it would have gone ill with me. After I was on the plaza I tore off my jacket and swung it a little in front of them as I backed toward the cabin. ... It made [the male] very angry. He foamed up all of his fur and became more dangerous. I got to the door, backing" The next day her husband shot these two hybrids.
- A third 20-month-old seriously threatens Crisler when she tries to remove a dead sheep from the area (p. 171): "He had always cherished property, hated even for me to remove empty [feeding] pans. So now he menaced me. He made lunges toward me, chest low, gnashing his teeth." Crisler was saved from attack by the wolf mother chasing off the aggressive male

hybrid.

- Of another hybrid she writes (p. 183): “I did not trust [this male, 2½ years old] to keep responses untangled. He would stand up to play with me and [a female] would nip his tail... He growled, he wanted to bite--someone. I was afraid he would snap at my face because [the female] was biting his tail. His friendliness I did not doubt, but I knew he was reckless and almost without inhibitions.”
- One day a child visitor in the cabin is “playfully” teasing two male hybrids via a broken window pane in the door (p. 184): “The wolf-dogs made short furious rushes toward the door. They would have killed the boy if they could have got to him.” The boy’s mother stopped it. The mother remarks, “I could see they weren’t taking it like dogs. It wasn’t play to them.”
- One of the male hybrids had shown “heartfelt hate” towards Crisler since his puppy days. Despite attempts to avoid him in the yard, he repeatedly comes out of nowhere and bites or tries to attack her and various visitors. Crisler is saved several times by the wolf’s intervention. One day, this hybrid was unusually friendly when she went into the yard, even licking her hand then trotting off. When Crisler started back towards her cabin (p. 189-90), “[this hybrid] came from the far side of the yard like a shot and bit my arm. I fell; both knees were bruised. The fall startled him back enough so that I got to my feet. The force of the blow had swung me around. I backed toward the door, saying quietly, ‘No \_\_\_\_\_, don’t do that,’ and waving my arm toward him. I felt the air of unexpected death around me. I managed to tear off my jacket and wave it. He was crouching and springing, holding off a bit because of the jacket. I backed to the wrong side of the propped-open screen door, had to step forward and back into the right side. I did not know whether I would make it.” A few hours later, Crisler cracked the door and hand-fed this hybrid, who by then took the bites of food and seemed harmless. The next day, her husband shot this hybrid. Crisler reflects later (p. 190) on whether some other behavior on her part would have made a difference, prevented the attack: “Probably not. [This male] had lived in a queer, uneasy equilibrium, showing how potent and how opposed dog nature and wolf nature are. They seem alike. They are worlds apart.” She admits (p. 188), “I had not realized the shadow \_\_\_\_\_ cast until I breathed with elation at this death; a weight was off my back.”
- Two hybrids (a male and a female) become so unpredictable that Crisler doesn’t dare enter their area even to feed them. She asked a visiting acquaintance to shoot them. He did, plus a third one “by accident”.
- When the wolf has a fourth litter, Crisler steals two of the six pups and kills them -- her means of “population control”. At this point, Crisler is realizing that lots of hybrid companions aren’t solving her wolf’s supposed loneliness problem, so she looks for (but doesn’t find) a captive wolf to add to the bunch she’s already keeping.
- Yet another hybrid (female, 18 months old) turns out to be routinely escaping the estate. Despite her attachment to this animal, Crisler puts her down with an overdose of sleeping pills, worried that this female will teach the others to escape.
- After almost eight years of living like this, there turn out to be “personal differences that could not be resolved” between Crisler and her husband. They will have to sell the cabin and land. There is no bearable place to rehome all the animals, so they’ll have to be killed. They all get a dose of sleeping tablets, then once unconscious a bullet to the head.

This series of anecdotes is intended to illustrate what it's like to live with wolf-dog hybrids. It's a chilling story and may sound brutal, but fairness to Crisler is important. Please take the trouble to read my epilog concerning her and her [book](#).

A second collection of frank information is contained in Peter Steinhart's *The Company of Wolves* (1995), chapter 8. First-hand stories in this chapter affirm that hybrids are often impossible to houstrain; that they can show sudden predatory behavior towards humans and other dogs; that they will sometimes bloody themselves digging through walls or fences or crashing through plate glass windows to escape and roam; that they tear up your house if you leave them alone for a few hours. They don't adapt to you -- you have to adapt your own life to living with their wants and limitations.

And then there are some disturbing stories of unexpected aggression that is neither dog-like nor wolf-like, but a result of mixing two contradictory worlds:

- A woman breeding hybrids had one that was especially affectionate. This male seemed to adore women and babies. One day, the woman tried to exercise dominance over the hybrid. Without any warning signals at all, he lunged and tried to kill her. He bit her repeatedly in the chest, going for her throat. The woman relates, "I shoved my hands down his throat and let him chew on those, and backed out the gate. I was quite certain that if I had fallen, he would have killed me." She sent the hybrid to another home, where he turned out to be highly aggressive towards women and children. In the end, he was euthanized. (p. 306)
- Another of this woman's hybrids, a female, was so cuddly that this breeder took her to schools, where the young hybrid behaved affectionately towards the children, licking each of their faces as they sat in a circle in the classroom. In adulthood, a different behavior emerged -- the breeder states that by the time she had children of her own, this hybrid had become very aggressive to children. (p. 307)
- Steinhart cites (p. 307) a 1988 case of a grandmother's hybrid killing a baby when it picked the infant up by the head. He cites the [Nathan Carpenter](#) and [Kevin Lahey](#) cases, as well as two separate cases of a hybrid chewing a child's arm off. The book leaves out thirteen other children that had been killed by hybrids before it was published. Hybrids have killed another nine people since the book's publication in 1995 ([see our archive](#)).

## **Damage to animals**

Humans are not the only casualties of the hybrid-breeding industry. Literally all animals are damaged by this craze.

Because of their nature, **wolves** always suffer from captivity, even when they are held on large estates at sanctuaries that possess real expertise. They suffer yet more in zoos, even when staff does their best to accommodate the animals. You can imagine what it means to a wolf to be kept on a small terrain by a breeder -- backyard or industrial -- who is interested in maximizing offspring and damned be the wolf's needs.

Most hybrids manage to escape regularly from the household or yard they're kept in, an



indication of how unhappy they are in confinement. A huge number of people dump their hybrid in the countryside before its third birthday. In both cases, some of these roamers will attack people or livestock. These attacks are often blamed on wolves. This heightens the already strong aversion some have for the protection and conservation of wolves. Some permanently dumped hybrids inhabit territory that would otherwise be available for the return of wolves, since wolves won't try to occupy an already taken area.

If some roaming hybrids manage to mate with wolves, this also damages the chances of wolf conservation, since only genetically pure wolves are protected by law. When a farmer or rancher sees an animal stalking his livestock but doesn't dare shoot it because it might be a wolf (whereas he can legally shoot a hybrid), this again lessens support for wolf conservation.

**Dogs** also suffer from the hybrid fad. Many of the matings are forced. Once hybrids are placed and grown up, many will kill dogs they live with or run into during escapes. Hybrid attacks on both humans and animals distort our idea of what dogs are, and the aggressive breeds industry uses hybrid behavior to promote the idea that killing is normal dog behavior. It is not.

The **hybrids** suffer. No matter the percentage wolf, they're always torn between two worlds and fit neither of those. Breeders who produce large numbers of puppies are puppy mills. Like dog puppy mills, they can't provide parent animals with adequate care. They certainly can't give the hybrids pups the intensive handling and 'socialization' that could, in the most genetically lucky pups, somewhat prepare them for life in human households. The vast majority of adult hybrids end up treated like a disposable consumer article -- dumped (chained) in the back yard or dumped at the roadside.

## **Human dysfunctions**

Most of us understand there's something wrong when people want an animal in their homes that forms an unpredictable and possibly fatal threat to themselves, their children, their neighbors and all other animals in the area. In this section, we'll try to untangle some of the human failings that can lead to this kind of choice. None of these represent psychiatric diagnoses -- however, when people are willing to endanger even their own children, there is some justification for thinking a dysfunctional pattern has reached the level of a pathology.

**Extreme fashion and status consciousness:** This can be due to weak self-esteem, thus excessive attention seeking, expressed in the need to have the most expensive handbag on the block -- or the most exclusive pet. It can also be a status issue, a man wanting a more macho image in circles where dominance and a credible threat of violence are interpreted as upped masculinity. Often it's fans of a television dog trainer, who impresses upon them that getting a dangerous dog type shoots you to the top of the wannabe dog expert ladder without any other effort on your part.

**Immaturity and lack of impulse control:** These are people who never really grew up. They see a film or television series (or a television dog trainer) and immediately believe it can all be true. Life can really be like that! Too immature to distinguish between fantasy and real life, and lacking impulse control, they don't bother to cool their heads or do any fact-finding. Rather,

they quickly acquire the object that was central to the fantasy story, plop it down in their living room, and expect a rerun of the movie to start...with them as the star.

You could call this 'the 101 Dalmatians phenomenon'. Every time that movie comes out again, shelters are flooded a few months later with impulse-buy Dalmatians that are abandoned when the reality of owning an energetic dog sets in.

**Social failure:** Some people have trouble finding a satisfying social context in our modern world. They long to be in touch with what they imagine as 'the wild'. They hope that buying a wolf-dog hybrid will satisfy this longing while also proving that they, themselves, only have social problems because too much of the ['noble savage'](#) is still alive in them. This noble savage in them is, strangely enough, indifferent to the fact that by getting a hybrid they are helping to keep at least one captive wolf miserable and are also contributing to possible extinction of the entire species. Many of this group are, in their loneliness, also hoping to have a creature that is loyal only to them, that rejects or fears all the rest of the world -- their own personal emotional prisoner who can't reject them the way so many people do.

**Control issues:** Some of this group know a hybrid is a gamble, but they want to prove that unlike other, inferior people, they can make a hybrid into a real house-pet. Others have no idea and think they're going to prove that everyone who talks about the dangers is just a weak, uninformed fool. They believe they can control what another being is by their special understanding and kindness -- a power trip presented as "I can reform anything, make it into something else by virtue of my will". These are very like women who write to serial killers on death row, sure they are the only ones in the world who really understand the poor killers and can bring out the tender, socially responsible man in him.

**Co-dependence:** Some people get a hybrid, find out their whole lives have to revolve around the animal, and that it gives only sparse intermittent reward. As we all know, intermittent reward quickly leads to addiction to the [game](#). This is similar to people whose lives get their meaning from revolving around an abuser, an alcoholic or an addict and his/her demands and problems. The devotion feels noble and virtuous, since the other is difficult and vulnerable and needs saving. They can present to the outside world as a self-sacrificing martyr. Defending the co-dependent relationship becomes almost like a religion, in which they are the central saint -- this despite the fact that they are enabling destructive behavior. In the case of hybrids, these pseudo-martyrs are strong enablers of the hybrid breeders and the harm they do to animals.

**The 'rescue angel':** This is not the same thing as people who are sincerely concerned about the animal world. Those know that you have to understand what a particular type of animal really is if you want to help one of them or their whole species. They understand -- with a sad heart -- that sometimes humane euthanasia is the most loving option you can give an animal. They will support efforts to prevent the birth of animals that consumers might want, but which will never have happy lives among us. They'll support efforts to prevent the births of animals whose existence will unnaturally and unnecessarily endanger the lives of too many other living creatures.

The 'rescue angel' is, like the co-dependent, an enabler posing as a martyr. It can be reasonable to try to offer an already-born animal a fitting and safe home, while working to prevent more from being born. It's another to fight tooth and nail at the same time against regulation of the industry that breeds these unhappy and/or dangerous animals. So the 'rescue angel' beats herself on the chest about how virtuous she is, all the while fighting to continue the animal misery she claims to be relieving.

Unfortunately, many 'humane' societies belong in this category. Like the savior angels and the fans of other dangerous dog types, they'll claim that it's ethical to accept a 'few' human deaths in service of 'animal rights' or 'animal well-being'. There are three problems with this 'ethic': 1) its proponents don't define the term 'few' or tell us at exactly what number the scale tips to too many human deaths; 2) they leave out animal deaths at the jaws of dangerous dog types; and 3) they ignore the fact that the existence of these man-made animals serves no animal well-being at all and in fact violates the rights of all animals involved.

## **Conclusion**

It should be clear at this point that wanting a hybrid is mostly a consumer ego and breeder avarice issue, and that has nothing to do with understanding or loving any animal, be it wolf, dog or hybrid. The same is true of all wild-domestic hybridization. This hybridization is one of the more perverse things we do to animals both wild and domestic, reducing them to mere consumer articles, passing fashion items, and ego props. This is perhaps even worse than the use of animals in laboratories, whose use and care at least has to meet ethical and legal standards and is intended to serve some greater good; which are humanely euthanized after an experiment is done; which are not allowed to present a threat to origin species living in the wild; and which do not present a threat to the lives of our children.

No ethical argument can be made for breeding, selling, buying or keeping wolf-dog hybrids. The sacrifice of children's lives to this fad serves no purpose at all for animals and only damages all involved.

One of the best ways to protect our children is to make the market for hybrids collapse. If we know someone who is considering buying a hybrid, we are now prepared to try to dissuade them. Even if they are willing to risk human lives, they may not want to support an industry that causes so much animal misery and death and may in the end lead to the extinction of the wolf. Even if the industry continues, every hybrid not bought means possible lives saved, much unhappiness prevented, and help for the wolf as a species. It's also wise to refuse to donate to any wolf sanctuary or zoo that sells hybrids or fights against legislation to regulate them. All the tiny bits count, and it's with our own behavior-- including spreading accurate information or making someone look in a mirror -- that we change things.

## **Note re Lois Crisler:**

The book *Captive Wild* is full of projection of human motives onto the animals. It's full of excusing sentimentality on the one hand and it betrays an equally sentimental egoism on the other hand. If she had been doing it now, we could have called Crisler an animal hoarder, with the added malevolence that she continued breeding the animals after she understood they were innately unfit -- both dangerous and unhappy -- to live among us. She didn't only kill the dangerous ones, she also used killing as a means of population control -- but still kept breeding. Nowadays, her story would be merely a tale of exploitative narcissism. It's important to remember that Crisler was born and lived in another age. She was an English instructor and photographer, not a biologist, and little was known about wolf ecology and behavior back then. Crisler was one of the first to make the public aware that wolves weren't just vicious predators and thus to start the end of our war on wolves. She didn't keep a wolf as a vanity item, but because the only other choice for that wolf was death. She had no idea how difficult captivity would turn out to be for the wolf. Before the first hybrid litter, she had no idea what kind of animals the hybrids would turn out to be. If she had stopped breeding after that first litter, her story would not have deteriorated into the rescue-angel-martyred-me tale it ends up being. The book reveals much about life with hybrids, but it also reveals that the author practiced much self-deception and possessed many of the human failings listed above in this piece. We shouldn't be too quick to judge her, but we should certainly learn the lessons her story offers -- both about hybrids and about ourselves, our own capacity for self-deception and about narcissism disguised as caring.

Alexandra Semyonova  
Newark, NJ  
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*Alexandra Semyonova is an internationally acclaimed animal behaviorist and author of [The 100 Silliest Things People Say About Dogs](#). Academically educated in behavioral science and specialized in animal behavior, she has worked with dogs and their owners on a daily basis for more than 30 years. Visit her website at [Nonlinear Dogs](#).*

## **Reading lists if you want more detailed knowledge:**

*Re wolves:*

*The Wolf; The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species*, by L. David Mech, 1970, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN

Mech's journal articles can be found on Internet. It's also worth looking at work by E. Klinghammer and by E. Zimen.

*The Company of Wolves*, by Peter Steinhart, 1995, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, NY

Re dogs:

*Dogs; A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior and Evolution*, by Raymond Coppinger and Lorna Coppinger, 1990, Scribner, New York, NY

*The 100 Silliest Things People Say About Dogs*, by Alexandra Semyonova, 2009, The Hastings Press, Hastings, UK

Re hybrids

*Captive Wild*, by Lois Crisler, 1968 (Harper & Rowe) / 2000 Lyons Press, New York, NY

*The Company of Wolves*, by Peter Steinhart, 1995, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, NY -- Chapter 8

Re the human factor:

*The Narcissism Epidemic; Living in the Age of Entitlement*, by Jean M. Twenge, PhD and W. Keith Campbell, PhD, 2009, Free Press, New York, NY

*Dogfighting: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity*, by R. Evans, D. Gauthier, and C. Forsyth, *Sex Roles*, Vol 39, 11/12, 1998.

[http://webs.wofford.edu/williamsnm/animal\\_ethics\\_articles/dogfighting\\_symbolic\\_expression\\_of\\_masculinity.pdf](http://webs.wofford.edu/williamsnm/animal_ethics_articles/dogfighting_symbolic_expression_of_masculinity.pdf)

*The Psychology of the Child*, by Jean Piaget, 1969 / 2000, Basic Books, Inc., New York, NY

*The Moral Judgment of the Child*, by Jean Piaget, 1985 / 1997, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY

*Women Who Love Men Who Kill*, by Sheila Isenberg, 1991, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY

*Cold-Blooded Kindness; Neuroquirks of a Codependent Killer; or Just Give Me a Shot at Loving You, Dear, and Other Reflections on Helping That Hurts*, by Barbara Oakley, 2011, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY

*Pathological Altruism*, Eds Barbara Oakley, Ariel Knafo, Guruprasad Madhavan, and David Sloan Wilson, 2012, Oxford University Press, New York, NY

*The Sociopath Next Door*, by Martha Stout, PhD, 2005, Broadway Books, New York, NY