

## **Greenland Wolf Research Program: 13<sup>th</sup> Field Season**

### **Abbreviated Expedition Report**

The expedition took place during the period July 1–29, 2014 in northeast Greenland. We arrived in Mestersvig on July 1, but found that spring was 2 weeks late, as the area was about 80% snow-covered. This meant that the Twin Otter airplanes used in the region would not be able to land at many sites which was an added complication. After an extended delay at Mestersvig due to logistical difficulties, we finally managed to get out on July 22 on a flight from Constable Point to Ella Island, continuing with us to Stordal near Hold with Hope. We spent the following week in the area, hiking about 120 km before returning to Mestersvig on July 29. We left Greenland that very same afternoon for Iceland.

We did not encounter any wolves during our week in Hold with Hope. This was not surprising, as wolves may well be present in an area but not observed for a number of reasons. What was somewhat surprising, however, was that not a single wolf track was found despite hiking through some of the best tracking terrain in northeast Greenland (mud was abundant, and animal tracks were long-lasting and easily recognizable). Locations frequented by wolves in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1998, as evidenced by tracks, were completely devoid of wolf tracks during our visit. Furthermore, we found the 4 known den sites occupied by wolves in previous years to be generally collapsed and overgrown, indicating that the sites had been abandoned for many years. We observed no evidence of recent digging by wolves. Such work would have been readily apparent, because the number of holes at each site is recorded during our visits as a part of a den monitoring effort. Therefore, these dens have likely not been in use by wolves since the mid-1990s.

Arctic wolves travel widely. Because the Badland valley serves as a link between the Hold with Hope peninsula, Gauss Peninsula, and Hudson Land (areas rich in prey), it is almost certain that no wolves occurred in these areas either (or their tracks would have been observable in the mud of the Badland valley). We conclude therefore that the arctic wolf did not occur in this area during the summer of 2014 up until our departure. Military sightings of wildlife and records from hut log books at Myggbukta, Loch Fyne, and Stordal indicate, that the arctic wolf has been absent from Hold with Hope for years.

This apparent abandonment of important territory is similar to our finding in Jameson Land in 2012 and 2013. We have now searched 2 of the 3 core areas of this species without finding any recent evidence of its presence, indicating a general disappearance of the arctic wolf from those parts of northeast Greenland.

The grant from Gino Watkins Memorial Fund was important in our eventual success. We are very grateful to everyone who supported us in receiving support from the Fund for their confidence in our abilities to achieve success in the field despite significant obstacles.