

## Preparing a Wolf Thanksgiving Dinner

By Dan Monn, Animal Care/Gift Shop Assistant, Wolf Haven International

It's the holiday season, when many of us will be getting together with family and friends. A big part of holiday traditions are the wonderful meals we share. It's no different for the resident wolves at the sanctuary when they get their own turkey dinners. That's right, a full Thanksgiving meal for each of our residents!

Providing enrichment for the wolves is a very important part of what we do to provide a healthy environment for them. Enrichment helps break up the routine and provides novel mental and physical stimulation for the wolves. A few examples that we have distributed in the past include: sticks rubbed with unique scents, new or unusual food items (like oystersicles), and even bits of fur from other animals. In general, the smellier the enrichment item, the more it attracts the wolf's attention. This is a special time of year though, as few of the enrichment items we prepare make the office smell as good as turkey dinner for the wolves.

Preparing a turkey dinner for each of our 60 residents requires a team effort, so many of the staff pitch in to help. Animal care staff prep the sides in the days leading up to the big meal (though some of the sides are cooked, the turkey is always fed uncooked.) The day of the meal, staff set up an assembly line in the garage area. Separate "fixins" fill individual gallon-size buckets, and staff ladle a bit of each food item into the cavity of a raw bird. This includes mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, actual stuffing of course, and two kinds of dessert (pumpkin and apple pie filling). Finally, just before feeding time, the turkey is topped off with gravy. Oh yeah, there is one more item that I can't leave out.

The most "controversial" part of the meal is the lone Brussels sprout carefully placed in each turkey. Though a personal favorite of our Director of Operations, Wendy Spencer, it is not uncommon for this to be the only item the wolves leave behind when their meal is finished. Resident wolfdog Caedus, lover of all that is edible, made his opinion clear last year when he spit his sprout out after just a brief taste. One of our most voracious eaters, male wolf Lakota, was filmed from start to finish eating his entire turkey in just six minutes -but even he left the Brussels sprout laying on the ground.

We hope you enjoy your special holiday meal - with or without Brussels sprouts - as much as the wolves seem to enjoy theirs.