

A den of their own: Shy Wolf Sanctuary provides a home for six wolf-dogs

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If the humans had had a long day — and they had — the animals' must have seemed even longer.

Approximately 20 volunteers from the Shy Wolf Sanctuary in Golden Gate Estates traveled to Belle Glade, at the southern tip of Lake Okeechobee, on Sunday to rescue six wolf-dogs, a hybrid of the two species. The wolf-dogs' owner died last August, and taking care of them was beyond what his son could do.

So the volunteers made the four-hour round trip, taking cages to transport the dogs. With veterinary services provided by Bonita Springs veterinarian Dr. Mike Gordon, the animals were given the full treatment, including having their toenails clipped, flea meds administered and open wounds salved. They were also probed and prodded for blood tests and rabies shots, but only after a tranquilizer was given.

"We had to sedate them before we could treat them," said Nancy Smith, Shy Wolf Sanctuary founder, and host — the sanctuary's pens and kennels sit in the acreage behind her home on 27th Street Southwest. "They're fearful — they haven't had much human interaction, certainly not since August. It was awful where they were — nothing to lie on but rocks filled with poop, and rotten wood."

Many were gaunt, with festering sores on their ears, legs and paws. In their new home, they will have shade, companionship, regular meals and the loving care of a dedicated cadre of volunteers, so Sunday's move, while perhaps unsettling in the short term, is the best thing that could have happened to them.

Shy Wolf Sanctuary was already home to approximately 60 creatures, ranging from Cimarron, a Florida panther, to a bobcat called Professor Bob Leo, coyotes, four kinds of fox, prairie dogs and tortoises. But the majority of the residents are somewhere along the wolf to dog continuum, and on Sunday, they made their voices heard greeting the newcomers. A low-grade howling spread across the kennels as each wolf-dog made his or her entrance, still doozy from the tranquilizers and transported with its cage on a rubber-wheeled cart.

Cimarron the panther spoke up, too, letting Lobo, a wolf-dog being wheeled past his enclosure at a distance of about one inch (plus several layers of wire and chain link fence) what he thought of wolves and dogs in general, hissing, spitting and growling deep in his throat. The volunteers ignored him.

"He's just blowin' smoke," said one, and backed it up by thrusting his arm into the cat's enclosure to scratch the panther on the back.

"Poor Lobo. He's thinking, 'Great. They're going to feed me to a cat,'" said volunteer Christa Fagliarone, 22, helping push the crate down the narrow passage between the kennels. And as kennels go, these accommodations are something like the Ritz-Carlton for previously malnourished wolves. Each has shade overhead from trees and a grape arbor, multiple levels accessed by wooden ramps, a den to get away from it all, a wading pool and even stuffed animals.

"To keep cool in the summer, they have to have water to step in, shade to lay in and dirt to dig in," said Smith. While that is true for all the canines, exactly where they fall along the spectrum of dog and wolf is a bit of a mystery, with not much known by the staff about their backgrounds.

"They all have different amounts of wolf and dog in them," said Smith. "We don't know how much. But Lobo, here, he's a wolf." For comparison, she takes a visitor over to some of the purebred wolves living at Shy Wolf. In one kennel, volunteer Ellery Lennon, 20, is grooming a couple of them, and pausing now and then for a nuzzle.

Bringing in six wolf-dogs in one day was the biggest single rescue ever undertaken at Shy Wolf. Whether they stay longterm at the sanctuary depends on the individual animals.

"We have to earn their trust. We'll see which ones socialize well, and they will be adoptable," said Smith. "The others will have a home here."

Shy Wolf Sanctuary is a licensed, inspected, award-winning nonprofit organization that depends on community donations to fulfill their mission and maintain their animal residents. To learn more, volunteer or help financially, go to www.shywolfsanctuary.com (<http://www.shywolfsanctuary.com>) or call 239-290-9867.