

March 2026

Wildwood Trust  
Mr Paul Whitfield, Director General

## **Formal Protest and Recommendations Regarding the Euthanasia of the Wolf Pack at Wildwood Trust**

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My name is Masaori Tanaka, Representative Director of the Japan Dog Behaviorist Association (JDBA). As a specialist in applied behaviour analysis and animal behaviour therapy, I write to formally express my deep concern and protest regarding the euthanasia of five wolves carried out at your facility on 25 March 2026, and to identify fundamental problems inherent in the decision-making process that led to this outcome.

### **I. Structural Failure in the Design of the Captive Environment**

Your facility houses over 200 species across approximately 40 acres (roughly 160,000 m<sup>2</sup>), with the wolf enclosure constituting only a portion of that space. Given that the home range of wild wolves extends from several hundred to several thousand square kilometres, it is evident that this spatial constraint functioned as a powerful Establishing Operation (EO) for behavioural problems.

Of particular concern is the fact that all five wolves—Nuna, Odin, and their offspring Minimus, Tiberius, and Maximus—were kept in the same enclosed space over an extended period. As Mech (1999) clearly demonstrated, wild wolf packs are fundamentally family units consisting of a breeding pair and their offspring, with young wolves naturally dispersing as they mature. In captivity, however:

*“captive packs often include members forced to remain together for many years”  
(Mech, 1999, p. 1196)*

The prolonged confinement of three maturing males—prevented from any natural dispersal—constituted sufficient conditions for an escalation of intra-pack aggression. Knutson (2017) further demonstrated that the amount of time spent in captivity significantly influences the frequency of aggressive behaviours in gray wolves, and that the overall increase in such behaviours can be attributed to a complex of contributing factors including human interaction, feeding practices, and pack dynamics.

### **II. Behavioural Consequences of Commercial Habituation Programmes**

The “Wolf Feeding Encounter” programme offered commercially by your facility—described as allowing participants to hand-feed wolves “close enough to feel their breath”—raises serious

concerns from an animal welfare perspective.

Habituation to humans and genuine socialisation are fundamentally distinct processes. As McNay (2002) documented in a comprehensive review of wolf-human encounters in Alaska and Canada, habituation contributed to unprovoked wolf aggression toward people in multiple cases, and wolves that received food directly from humans quickly developed persistent, aggressive approach behaviour. Smith and Stahler (2003) further noted that wolves can lose their natural wariness of humans through frequent and increasingly closer contact, and recommended active management to prevent habituation in Yellowstone National Park. In a five-year field study of the Pipestone wolves in Banff National Park, Bloch and Marriott (2016) recorded 140 human-wolf encounters without a single instance of attack, threat, or bluff charge directed toward a human. Notably, 74% of these encounters occurred at distances exceeding 100 metres, and the researchers' methodological approach was grounded in non-interference with wolf behaviour.

Promoting rewilding as an organisational mission while simultaneously operating a commercial hands-on habituation programme represents a fundamental epistemological contradiction. The fact that this contradiction went unexamined for over two decades reflects a systemic failure of critical thinking within your organisation.

### **III. The Linguistic Deception of “Humane Euthanasia”**

Your public statements repeatedly frame the euthanasia as “the most humane option” and the “best welfare choice.” This logic is fundamentally inverted.

Animal welfare, properly understood, means ensuring that animals can express the full behavioural repertoire natural to their species (Broom, 1986). Your facility failed to meet this standard from the outset. An enclosed space with no possibility of dispersal, a commercial habituation programme, and the absence of any behavioural science assessment framework—these were pre-existing conditions, and the euthanasia was their consequence. The phrase “to prevent further suffering” serves to present only the final act as humane, while deflecting scrutiny from every prior decision that created the suffering in the first place.

Furthermore, your statement asserts that the decision was made “after extensive consultation with leading wolf specialists from across Europe, experienced veterinary professionals, and an independent ethical review.” Yet the names, affiliations, and areas of expertise of these specialists, together with the content and conclusions of the ethical review, have not been made public. A decision-making process lacking transparency cannot claim scientific legitimacy. It has also not been possible to confirm from publicly available information whether an applied animal behaviourist or applied behaviour analyst was involved at any stage.

### **IV. Formal Requests**

In light of the above, we formally request the following:

First, the full disclosure of the decision-making process leading to the euthanasia, including the names, qualifications, and areas of expertise of all specialists consulted, the details of all interventions attempted, and the content of the ethical review.

Second, a formal investigation into the role played by commercial habituation programmes—including the Wolf Feeding Encounter—in the behavioural breakdown of the pack, with publication of the findings. Furthermore, the establishment of a mandatory behavioural science risk assessment process for the design of any future visitor experience programme involving wild animals.

Third, the integration of specialists in applied behaviour analysis and ethology into the decision-making processes governing the care of wild animals at your facility. We note that your Director General has stated publicly that the keeping of wolves will be reviewed, and strongly urge that this review be informed by rigorous behavioural science.

Fourth, the publication of a detailed case report on this incident, making the lessons learned available to the wider wild animal facility community so that comparable tragedies may be prevented.

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The lives of Odin, Nuna, Minimus, Tiberius, and Maximus cannot be restored. However, an honest reckoning with this case, leading to substantive institutional change, is the very minimum that your organisation owes to the animals that may come after them.

We respectfully request your sincere and thorough response to the concerns raised in this letter.

**Masaori Tanaka**

Representative Director

Japan Dog Behaviorist Association (JDBA)

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**References**

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