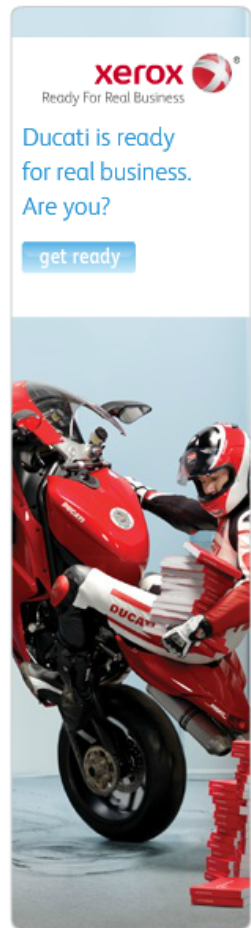


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Lovelorn wolf back on the hunt in California

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By Suzanne Hurt
SACRAMENTO, California | Fri Apr 6, 2012 9:03am EDT

(Reuters) - A male wolf that made headlines by becoming the first of its species in more than 80 years to be found in the wild in California has crossed back into the Golden State on its determined quest for a mate.

The gray wolf, designated OR7 by wildlife managers, has traveled more than 2,000 miles since leaving its pack in northeastern Oregon last September and heading south, paying its first visit to California in late December.

The animal, which wandered back to Oregon in early March, returned to California last Friday and was still roaming a forested area in northern Siskiyou County on Thursday, said Karen Kovacs, wildlife program manager with the California Department of Fish and Game.

Young male wolves like OR7, which will turn 3 in mid-April, must leave the home range of their parents to find a female companion and reproduce because only the dominant pair in each wolf pack form a mating bond.

"What happens is they leave looking for love. And when they don't find it, they keep walking - because the love of their life is just over that hill," said Ed Bangs, a wolf expert who spearheaded the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's reintroduction of wolves to the lower 48 states in the 1990s. "He won't stop doing that until he dies. Or he finds the love of his life."

OR7, fitted with a tracking collar, gained worldwide attention after entering California on December 28, making it the state's first wild wolf since the last one was trapped and killed in 1924 in Lassen County.

The newcomer loped along the crest of the Cascade Mountains, crossed highways and rivers, including the Deschutes and Klamath, and traveled to within 15 miles of the Nevada border on its journey.

OR7 spent about two months in northern California before heading back to its home state in early March. The gray wolf is listed as an endangered species in the Pacific Northwest, making it protected under federal law.

Steve Pedery, conservation director of the environmental group Oregon Wild, said there are at last 29 wolves inhabiting Oregon.

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California wildlife officials were surprised to learn the wolf had returned.

Most wolves travel less than 100 miles in search of new territory and mates.

About a dozen gray wolves are known to have traveled distances of 180 miles or more since the species was reintroduced in the continental United States. One female wolf was documented to have roamed 3,000 miles from Wyoming and back again, Bangs said.

OR7 presumably has picked the wrong direction by heading into California, where no others of his kind are known to exist in the wild.

"He doesn't know there's nobody south of him," Bangs said.

(Editing by [Steve Gorman](#) and Paul Simao)

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