

Book Review

By Bob Edmonds

The Secret World of Red Wolves: The Fight to Save North America's Other Wolf, by T. DeLene Beeland, 272 pages, 24 illustrations, 2 figures, 2 maps, bibliography, index, published by The University of North Carolina Press.

Red wolves are shy, elusive, and misunderstood predators. Until the 1800s, they were common in the long leaf pine savannas and deciduous forests of the southeastern United States. However, habitat degradation, persecution, and interbreeding with the coyote nearly annihilated them. Today, reintroduced red wolves are found only in peninsular northeastern North Carolina within less than one percent of their former range. In *The Secret World of Red Wolves*, nature writer T. DeLene Beeland shadows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's pioneering recovery program over the course of a year to craft an intimate portrait of the red wolf, its history, and its restoration. Her engaging exploration of this top-level predator traces the intense effort of conservation personnel to save a species that has slipped to the verge of extinction.

Red wolves are not red per se. Beeland said, "I describe it as a forest red, like the reddish hue of dried pine

straw lit by a golden summer sunset. The red of their coats is really cinnamon or umber dusting on the backs of their ears and running down their shoulders and legs. But red wolves are mostly tawny with brownish and black guard hairs, whitish fur lining their lips, and lighter fur on their undersides. The name 'red wolf' was a common name used locally in central Texas that later became popularized over the animal's entire southeastern range."

Beeland weaves together the voices of scientists, conservationists, and local landowners while posing larger questions about human coexistence with red wolves, our understanding of what defines this animal as a distinct species, and how climate change may swamp its current habitat.

T. DeLene Beeland is a nature and science writer living in Asheville, N.C. Her work has appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* and *Wildlife in North Carolina*, among other publications.

"Book List" calls Beeland's book, "The first complete telling of the comeback of the red wolf ... The combination of first-person immediacy interwoven with red wolf history will delight animal lovers."