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Running with the pack

by BRIAN LOCKHART

There is a photo and caption that has been making the rounds through social media over the past couple of years.

There's a reasonable chance you have seen it pop up on your Facebook page.

It is a well-done photo of a pack of 25 wolves, all in single file, making its way across a winter landscape.

As impressive as the photo is, it is the caption that explains what is going on that is interesting.

The caption explains how the wolves organize as a pack to remain safe.

The pack, the caption says, is led by the old and the sick, because if they were at the rear, they would fall behind and get lost. They lead the pace of the group as it moves across the snowy tundra.

In case of an ambush, this first group would be sacrificed.

Following the old and sick, are the five strongest ones ? the ones who could fend off an attack and protect the pack.

The alpha male of the group takes up the position at the rear of the group where he can see everything and make decisions on what the pack will do.

The whole presentation is delivered like it's a page out of National Geographic and written by someone who's spent 30 years in the wild studying wolf behaviour.

I've seen many comments where people state how we can ?learn from the wolves.'

I'm not sure we can learn anything from wolves other than maybe how to violently kill a sheep in a pen.

While this wolf photo and explanation did make a big splash when it came out, a second look at this information just doesn't make any sense at all.

For starters, saying the strongest wolves take their place to protect from an ambush doesn't make any sense.

Wolves don't get ambushed ? they ARE the predators. They don't have any natural enemies other than the occasional farmer with a 30.06 who is fed up with the wolves attacking his livestock.

Even a full-size grizzly bear wouldn't attack a wolf because it knows if it did, it would soon be dealing with an attack from several others wolves ? they don't run in a pack for no good reason.

As for the alpha male running the group and making decisions, there is no alpha male in a wolf pack. They're wolves ? there may be a dominant one who tries toshove some others around, but that'strue in any group of animals. Try throwinga couple of hamsters in a cage together and see what happens.

As for the sick and elderly, most animals don't care or realize that one of their group is sick. It's not like they are going to callfor a doctor.

It didn't take much research to find out the entire description of this noble and brave wolf pack is a lot of nonsense.

One naturalist who has observed wolves for three decades said wolves don't travel in any kind of organized march ? this group just happened to be running in a straightline because there is snow on the ground and the wolf in the lead is clearing thepath and the rest follow suit through the easiest route.

It is this type of misinformation we seem to be bombarded with over the pastfew years.

It is becoming more and more difficultto figure out what is fact and what issemi-fact, or just outright misinformation.

I guess this is what happens when anyone has the ability to place information on an international feed that can zip around the world in the blink ofan eye.

It's not all bad. You can learn a lotjust by clicking on a video made bysome guy half way around the world who decided to make a short film showing you his home town.

However, with so much misinformation out there, you might want to check your facts if you are doing research for something important. This must be really a must for students who are researching a paper.

You don't want to do sketchy research and produce a report saying one of Abraham Lincoln's favourite pastimes was playing Nintendo games ? which I actually did read in one history story.

The old phrase ?don't believe everything you read' is probably truer now, more than any other time in history.