

An Interview with Ian McAllister  
By Geoffrey M. Gluckman

In the last two decades, Ian McAllister, wildlife photographer and writer, has championed the causes of wilderness preservation. He co-founded Raincoast Conservation Society, but has since left that organization to direct Pacific Wild, another non-profit that dedicates itself to preserving one of the last ancient rainforests on earth, The Great Bear Rainforest.

Now, in McAllister's latest book, *The Last Wild Wolves*, he further celebrates that region along the central coast of British Columbia. Filled with jaw-dropping photos this book offers unparalleled insights into the Great Bear Rainforest's top predator, the wolf.

Often held in contempt by humans, wolves are shown in a new light through McAllister's lens and research over the last seventeen years. All of the team research was done non-invasively, meaning no radio collars, thus any need for dart guns filled with immobilization drugs. As one of the wild's most elusive species and one that illustrates a majesty and wisdom, they deserved to be cherished, not eliminated.

EARN: As a founder, you've been involved with the Raincoast Conservation Society for almost two decades. What sparked your initial interest in the region that you now call home?

IM: I did co-found Raincoast, but I left the group last spring and have founded a new group called Pacific Wild.

EARN: What are some of the aims and intentions of Pacific Wild?

IM: Our aim is to protect the marine and terrestrial environments of Canada's Great Bear Rainforest. This involves tackling the most pressing environmental issues facing this rare and threatened ecosystem. On the terrestrial front, protecting the remaining intact rainforest river valleys and islands as core conservancy areas remains an essential step towards protecting the Great Bear.

Clear-cut logging, especially western red cedar high grading, is a major threat to the rainforest. Stopping the biological, ethical, moral, and economically indefensible trophy hunt of large carnivores is also an outstanding environmental issue. Over 300 grizzly bears are killed legally for sport in BC and it is essentially open season hunting [and] trapping on wolves.

On the marine front, open net-cage salmon farms are responsible for the direct mortality of our wild salmon, yet the provincial government continues to expand this unsustainable industry. And the both the current federal and provincial governments are working feverishly to lift the moratorium on tanker traffic in the Great Bear. So salmon, the foundation species for the coast, are threatened directly, and if the moratorium is lifted we may very well be living through an Exxon Valdez legacy on our own coast.

EARN: When did your interest in photography begin?

IM: When I first traveled to the Great Bear. I realized that the only way to show enough people in the shortest amount of time - the beauty and the destruction – would be to take pictures and make them part of an integrated campaign to protect the Great Bear.

EARN: What led you to study the wolves?

IM: After a number of years of traveling the coast I soon realized that wolves were present throughout the rainforest islands and river valleys, yet no information on their status or ecology existed. Here was a large land mammal in North America that was completely unstudied.

EARN: How can others become involved with Pacific Wild's endeavors?

IM: Go to [pacificwild.org](http://pacificwild.org), learn about our conservation projects, and get in touch with us directly to learn how to support the conservation campaign on the BC coast.

EARN: What are ways that others can help stop trophy killing of wolves?

IM: Support [www.pacificwild.org](http://www.pacificwild.org)'s work to end the killing, write the BC government and demand they establish large core carnivore conservation areas on the coast that do not allow trophy hunting of wolves and other large carnivores. Right now trophy hunting is allowed in the most "protected areas".

EARN: What can be done to protect the core habitat and territorial ranges of these wolves?

IM: Increasing protection of the rainforest is essential. Currently not a single pack of wolves' entire range is fully protected in the Great Bear Rainforest. The remaining intact valleys and islands should be protected.

EARN: How can individuals help with this?

IM: Request the provincial and federal governments in Canada increase rainforest protection to ensure the survival of this globally rare rainforest wolf population.

EARN: In researching wolves, you must have studied previous works on the subject. Do any of these sources stand out as suggested reads for others?

IM: Barry Lopez and David Mech's work were both very inspiring. And First Nation's such as William Housty, David Gladstone and Pauline Waterfall taught me that viewing wolves through a western-based science lens offered all sorts of limitations.

EARN: Does research indicate that the high consumption of salmon by the coastal wolf packs (Fish Trap & Surf Pack) have either a positive or negative effect on these wolves in comparison to non-marine eating wolves?

IM: It is all positive. Few other wolf populations in the world have such a predictable, nutritious, and easily accessible food supply – so it is a significant dietary bonus to coastal wolves and may indicate higher pup survivorship and smaller home range size.

EARN: What is a typical day like for you (when not doing a book tour)?

IM: Running an environmental organisation in a remote location like this means that you have to wear countless hats. A typical day could involve working on a film project, tracking wolves or grizzly bears, setting up remote sensor cameras, running large and small boats, talking to various media about environmental issues, catching a salmon for dinner – and of course all of the day to day work that running a non-profit involves – fundraising, proposal writing, developing campaign strategies, designing educational projects – developing creative ways to convince the government to do more to protect the environment.

EARN: What steps can you suggest for anyone to take to change the unsustainable living practices used by most people?

IM: We can all do more to reduce our footprint on the planet, myself included, and we can certainly do more to convince our elected leaders that the environment is at the forefront of our collective concern for the future of this planet and our children.

EARN: From your extensive wildlife experiences, how do you see humans fulfilling their place in the natural world?

IM: I don't know if I have the answer to this question. I do know, that in the meantime, while we search for our place on planet earth, we have to do everything possible to ensure we protect as much biodiversity as possible. The Great Bear Rainforest, given its small human population and its globally significant ecosystem, should be an easy place to start.

For more inspiration on the Great Bear Rainforest and the wonders of nature, pick up a copy of Mr. McAllister's *The Last Wild Wolves*. You will not be disappointed. It is truly an awe-inspiring tour de force!