

Getting to Know our Wolves!!



Wolves are amazing animals! You probably know something about them from fairy tales like “Little Red Riding Hood” or “The Three Little Pigs”. In those stories, wolves act like scary and evil creatures. In other folk tales wolves look silly, helpful and even wise.

Are wolves misunderstood? Are they dangerous? What problems are there from learning about wolves from fairy tales? What are they really like?



A good way to understand wolves is to learn more about them—
not from fairy tales, but from scientific research

Let’s take a look at the facts and learn the truth about wolves!

What is a Wolf Pack? A wolf pack is the wolves’ family. Typically it includes the parents or breeding pair and offspring of various ages. Sometimes unrelated wolves are part of the family as well. The average family size is 4–12 wolves. Wolves are highly intelligent and are very social animals. All family members help to raise the pups that are born in April or May.

The parents are the family leaders. A family of wolves work together when hunting for food, raising the pups, and defending their territory. They care for each other and are very devoted and loyal to each other.



Wolf Pups: Baby wolves get a lot of loving care—they are well fed, and protected. The pups leave the den when they are 3 weeks old, but they stay nearby. When the family goes hunting, another member of the family “baby-sits”. At about 7–8 months, the pups begin traveling with the family to learn how to hunt. They love to play with their brothers and sisters, stalking and pouncing on each other. At one year old, they are the size of an adult, but they need two years to have the skills to be a good parent and a good hunter.



Food and Hunting: Wolves are carnivores who hunt large ungulates such as deer, elk, moose and caribou. To bring down such large prey, they hunt together with their family. The hunt is very dangerous. Sometimes wolves are injured and even killed by their prey. They may only succeed 1 or 2 times out of 10 hunts. When they don’t succeed, they eat smaller animals.

As a top predator and keystone species, wolves play an important role helping to maintain a natural balance in the landscape. For example, when wolves were re-introduced to Yellowstone National Park, they preyed on the elk, who were browsing heavily on trees and shrubs. Now the elk changed their behavior and decreased in number, giving the aspen and cottonwood a chance to grow. These plants could now shade the river—so fish, beaver and frogs increased—along with songbirds who needed the trees.

All because the wolf returned!

Body language: Wolves use body language to show other wolves how they feel about things.

To show

Anger: a wolf may stick its ears straight up and bare its teeth.

Suspicion: the wolf may pull the ears back and squint.

Fear: the wolf may flatten its ears against its head.

Have you ever seen similar body language in your pet dog?

Wolf Talk: Wolves make many sounds but they are famous for howling. They howl to find each other, to rally before going hunting, to celebrate a successful hunt, to defend their territory and maybe just for the fun of it! They can hear 6 miles in the forest & 10 miles in open tundra! They also use their scent to communicate.





Canis lupus - Gray wolf

Colors: Grey wolves are not only grey. They can also be black, reddish brown and white. Wolves in the Arctic are white. This helps them to be camouflaged in the snow.

Species: There are two species of wolves in North America: *Canis lupus*—the Grey Wolf and *Canis rufus*—the Red Wolf. Red wolves are very endangered and they only live in North Carolina.



Canis rufus—Red wolf

Are wolves dogs? No, but they share a common ancestor and almost all of their DNA. Even little dogs like chihuahuas are 99.9% wolf! Do you think that is why wolves and dogs look and act so much .

Wolves belong to the dog family called “Canidae”, which also includes coyotes, jackals, foxes, dingoes and the domestic dog. Wild canids in North American wolves, foxes and coyotes.

Size and Weight:

<u>Grey wolf</u>	<u>Red wolf</u>
Length: 4.5—6.5’	4’
Height: 26—32”	26”
Weight: 60—80 (F)	50 lbs (F)
80—100 (M)	60 lbs. (M)

Did you know?? A wolf’s nose is so sensitive that it can smell prey that is more than a mile away!



Did you know?? Under ideal conditions, wolves can hear each other as far away as 6 miles!

Range: In the 1800’s, gray wolves ranged all over North America. Human settlers competed with wolves for the elk, deer, bison and moose that wolves needed and they began raising sheep and cattle. Sometimes the wolves turned to domestic livestock for food. In the late 1800’s, wolves were eliminated from most of the lower 48 states by shooting, trapping and poisoning.

Today in America, most wolves live in Alaska, Idaho, Minnesota, Michigan, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Habitat: Gray wolves can live in most environments, including alpine areas and the tundra, but are usually found in forests. A large pack’s home range or territory can vary from 100 square miles to 1200 or more square miles. It all depends largely on how much prey live close by.

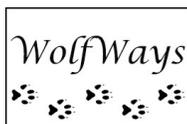
Wolves' large feet have webbing between their toes to help them be good at swimming and walking on snow. A male wolf track can be 4” wide x 4.5 “ long.



The Big Bad Wolf?? “Dangerous wolf-human interactions are extremely rare. They are more likely to occur when wolves are habituated to people, when dogs are involved, or if wolves are sick (e.g. rabies).”
<https://www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/faq.asp>

Remember that while wolves are beautiful and are especially cute and cuddly as puppies, it is never a good idea to try to tame any wild animal.

Let's keep them all safe and wild!



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