



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 begin our fact-finding mission about wolves now!

Wolf Classification

Some important details about wolves are that they are mammals (like cats, deer, dolphins, and people) and they are carnivores—a group of mammals that eat meat. They belong to the dog family called “Canidae,” which also includes coyotes, jackals, foxes, dingoes, and the domestic dog. Wild canids in North America are wolves, foxes, and coyotes.

Did you know?? When a member of the pack dies, wolves have been heard to howl a very sad-sounding howl. They have been seen to mourn for 6 weeks.

Fun fact: Wolves can eat about 20% of their body weight in one meal!! If you weigh 100 pounds, you would have to eat 20 pounds of food at one meal to be like a wolf - that's like eating 80 quarter-pound burgers in one sitting!

Lots of Facts

Species: There is only one species of wolf in North America, *Canis lupus*. Its common name is "gray wolf."

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

Weight and height:

Average length (tip of nose to tip of tail): 4.5 - 6.5 feet

Average height: (at the shoulder) 26 - 32 inches

Average weight: 60 - 80 pounds (female) & 70 - 100 pounds (male)

Life span: The oldest wolf in the wild was 14 years old. The average life span is only 5 - 7 years, however.

Speed: Wolves can run for short distances - to catch their prey - at 35 miles per hour!

Number: As of December 2015, there were 110 confirmed wolves in Oregon, living in 11 packs. 10 packs were in northeast Oregon and 1 pack was in southwest Oregon.



* Partially compiled from “Dialogue for Kids—Wolf Facts” - Idaho Public Television

Range: In the 1800s, gray wolves ranged all over North America. Human settlers competed with wolves for the elk, deer, bison, and moose that wolves needed, and the settlers began raising sheep and cattle. Sometimes the wolves turned to domestic livestock for food. In the late 1800s, 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 lives close by.



Did you know?? Under ideal conditions, wolf howls can be heard as far away as 6 miles!

All about packs: Wolves are highly intelligent and very social. They live in packs, averaging 4 - 11 wolves in size. The pack is a multigenerational wolf family. Typically, this includes the parents or breeding pair, and offspring of various ages. Sometimes unrelated wolves are part of the family as well. 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, feeding the pups, and defending their territory. They care for each other and are very devoted and loyal to each other.



Food and hunting: Wolves are carnivores and normally eat large ungulates such as deer, elk, moose, caribou, and bighorn sheep. To bring down such large prey, they must hunt together with their family. Sometimes they eat smaller animals like rabbits, beavers, voles, and ground squirrels.

As a top predator and keystone species, play an important role in 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. The elk changed their behavior and decreased in number, giving the aspen and cottonwood a chance to grow. These plants then shaded the river, so fish, beaver, and frogs increased, along with songbirds who needed the trees. All because the wolf returned!



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 pack "baby-sits."

At about 7 - 8 months, the pups begin traveling with the pack 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 the adult, but they need two years to gain the knowledge and skills of an adult.

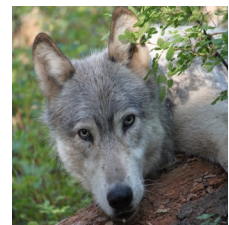
Did you know?? A wolf's nose is so sensitive that it can smell prey that is more than a mile away!

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: a wolf may pull its ears back and squint.
- Fear: a wolf may flatten its ears against its head.

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

Tail tales: A wolf's rank in the dominance order of the pack can be seen in the way it carries its tail. A more dominant wolf carries its tail high. A less dominant wolf carries it low.



Are wolves a threat to people? Even though wolves are social among themselves, they tend to avoid people. Wolf/human conflicts are extremely rare. Problems can occur when wolves get used to people, when dogs are involved, or if the wolf is sick. (<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/faq.asp>)

Remember that while wolves are beautiful and are especially cute and cuddly as a puppy, it is never a good idea to try to tame any wild animal. Let's help keep them all safe and wild!