

Critters

NWPS Newsletter for
Youth and Educators

Summer 2003



WILD ABOUT WOLVES



Wolves are fascinating and sometimes fearsome animals. They are part of our myths and legends. Have you ever wondered how many wolves are in BC or why you never see one? Do you know how they live or why they howl at night? Do you know how important they are to the ecology of BC and what threatens them the most? If these are some questions you have about wolves then you need to start thinking like one and follow your nose to the answers...

Wolves, coyotes and domestic dogs all come from the same group of animals called **Canids**. For many years people thought that domestic dogs were separate from wolves and coyotes. We now know that they are different from coyotes but are actually the same animal as wolves. Its hard to believe that a Chihuahua and a wolf are the same kind of animal, but they are. Scientists think that people bred wolves to get certain traits or looks from them way back in history. The result was our domestic dog. Fortunately the wild wolf still exists.

Today you can find wolves on every continent except Australia and Antarctica. In many places they are threatened by human expansion into their **habitats**. In the United states wolves are found in less than 15% of their original habitats. Fear of wolves stealing cattle or harming people has caused wolves to be **extirpated** from much of their range in Europe.



Several species of wolf have even gone **extinct**! In fact, there are only three **species** of wolf left in the whole world. The grey wolf is the most common found in North America, Europe, Asia and the Indian sub-continent. The Red wolf is found only in the south-eastern part of the United States and only 500 are left. The Abyssinian wolf is found only in Ethiopia in Africa and is threatened because people continue to move into the places where they live.



What Makes Wolves Special

Studying and understanding wolves is not an easy task. They spend most of their time hidden in the wild spaces of BC. For anyone lucky enough to spot a wolf it is usually a quick glimpse through the woods or else a startling, close up encounter that ends when the wolf lopes back to its peace and quiet. With new technologies it has become easier to track and study wolves, and scientists continue to learn more about them. So what is known about the grey wolves of BC?

Like all **mammals**, wolves bear live young. This normally occurs in April and May when food is plentiful. A female wolf will go into heat or oestrus, which means she can become (con't)

pregnant, only once every year and only for about a week. One unique aspect of the wolf **packs** is that usually only the **alpha** male and female will mate and have babies. Since the alpha male and female are usually the strongest and smartest members of the pack, this means that any babies born will also be strong and smart. The other members of the pack are physically prevented from mating and this helps to keep the pack from becoming too big. Also, if fewer **pups** are born the odds of survival are much higher. The gestation (time of pregnancy) period is 63 days. During this time the pregnant female will look for a safe den near water. As the pregnancy advances the mother will become unable to hunt and must rely on other members of the pack to bring her food. Having water nearby allows her to drink without hurting her pregnancy.

When the pups are born they are totally dependant upon their mother. Usually four to six pups are born, but there can be as many as fourteen. Pups are born with their eyes closed and weigh less than a pound. During the first two weeks they never leave their mother and spend most of their time drinking milk (nursing) and sleeping. After two weeks their eyes are open and they begin to go out of the den. At birth, wolf pup eyes are blue in color and will not turn the golden-yellow color until they are two to four months old. At one month of age wolf pups will begin to eat meat and start howling in imitation of the adults.

Wolves are very social animals and other members of the pack will frequently baby-sit while the mother is off hunting. Also during their second month the pups will be weaned off milk and begin learning how to hunt. By the time they are 8 months old they look like adults but will not be able to have babies until two years of age.

Wolves in the wild can live up to 13 years. The average life expectancy is 6-8 years.

Due to their highly social nature and ability to work together, wolves are able to hunt animals much larger than themselves. Their main food sources are deer, caribou and sheep but they will hunt animals as large as the 2,000 pound bison or as small as squirrels and snow hares.

Fearful and hunted until extirpated from most of their traditional range, wolves are a vital part of the ecosystem. As a top-level predator, their role in the **ecosystem** is to keep the population of prey animals healthy. Wolves commonly take down the sick and injured animals in herds because they are the easiest to catch.

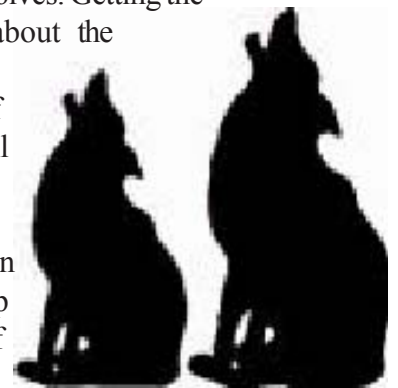
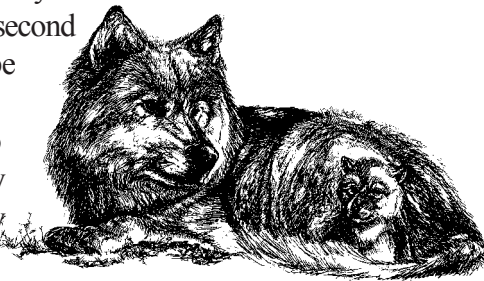
This is important to the herd otherwise these animals would consume food supplies needed by the healthy animals. While this might seem cruel it assures that the strongest and smartest animals survive. This is called natural selection and it is important to the survival of all species.

Humans have hunted wolves for hundreds of years. As humans moved further away from the cities and opened up new lands to farming and ranching wolves were pushed out of their traditional lands. In places where wolves remained people often feared that the wolves would kill their chickens and cattle. Wolves were killed because of this.

Wolves are considered fur bearing animals, which means they can be trapped for their fur. Wolf fur is very valuable and a complete pelt (wolf skin) can be sold for more than \$200. In some countries, money was offered to anyone who brought in a dead wolf and this encouraged people to hunt and kill them.

Humans are beginning to realize that the removal of wolves has caused many problems. In areas where there are no more wolves new diseases are appearing in deer herds. These diseases probably would not have been passed on if the sick animals had been eaten by the wolves. In some places huge population of deer are destroying the land. Without the wolves to keep the deer populations balanced the food sources are being exhausted and the deer are killing the trees in search of food.

Fortunately wolves are making a comeback in North America. In recent years they have been reintroduced in Montana and Idaho and strong populations are living in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin. In the last three years small populations of wolves have also been reported in Arizona and New Mexico. In Canada it is estimated there are about 60,000 wolves and they are found in 85% of their traditional habitats. As we continue to learn more about wolves we are realizing that their preservation is important to our own survival. Just reading this newsletter helps the wolves. Getting the word out to other people about the importance of wolves and encouraging the support of wolf reintroductions as well as limiting the hunting of wolves are important first steps. For more information on what you can do to help wolves see the last page of this newsletter.



What's All the Noise About? Why Wolves Howl

An eerie sound rises out of the woods. At first it sounds like a dog barking, but soon that single bark turns into a chorus of wild **howls**. Then it trails off into just a single bark followed by...silence. A pack of wolves has just made itself known. Why do wolves howl? How does it help them and what does it mean?

Howling is one way wolves communicate with each other. Different packs will identify themselves this way. Within a pack, wolves will communicate various information to each other by howling. Howling is so important that pups will imitate adults with high-pitched howls of their own. As a communication tool, howling is second to none in the wolf world for getting the message out over a long distance. A single wolf can be heard from over 15 km away. Frequently, howling occurs in the evening and is used to gather the pack for hunting and travelling.

Much like a mother standing on the porch and shouting for her children to come home for dinner, the alpha male will tell the rest of the pack to get ready to hunt. Howling before the hunt helps to excite the rest of the pack and also allows any wolves not with the pack to locate them. During the hunt wolves are silent. In popular stories wolves are often described as howling while chasing animals they are hunting. This is not true. Wolves hunt silently so that their prey is not scared away. After a successful hunt the chorus will start back up. One wolf will excitedly begin howling and the rest of the pack will join in. Not only does this seem to make the pack happy but it also allows members of the pack that got separated during the hunt to find their way back to the pack.

Wolves will also howl just for the joy of it. Usually when one starts up the other members of the pack will rush to join in the fun. Wolves do not have to be standing when they howl and many will start howling while sitting or lying down. When one wolf starts howling the other members of the pack join in but use different pitches and musical notes. If two wolves are howling the same note, one or both will switch to a different note or pitch. This creates the illusion of more wolves and also helps the members of the pack to tell each other apart.

When two wolf packs come into the same area they will howl to announce their presence. This serves to warn the newer group to avoid the territory.

If you are out in an area where you think there may be wolves, try out a howl of your own. Wolves will respond to the howls of other packs and even to human imitations. Don't worry. The wolves won't come to see who it is making the noise.



Wolf Myths

Rarely seen and very misunderstood, the wolf has become a permanent part of the myths of many cultures. As early as 400 B.C. Romans had stories about wolves raising children. This theme continued throughout time to include such famous stories as Rudyard Kipling's "*The Jungle Book*". In other cultures, the humans were believed to turn into wolves and attack people. Thus the legend of the werewolf was born. European culture also created such stories as "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and "Little Red Riding Hood", as ways of warning people about the dangers of wolves. This also created the belief that wolves are vicious, cunning and untrustworthy.

While many cultures perceived the wolf as a cruel hunter or dangerous animal to be destroyed or at least watched out for, the First Nations people of North America held them in high regard. One First Nations legend tells of two wolves that would swim in the ocean to catch food for the man who had raised them. Each day they would do this until there was more food than the man could eat. Then the Great Above Person saw all the food being wasted and the next time the wolves swam out to sea created a fog so that the wolves could not return to shore. The wolves were forced to remain at sea and became Orcas.

Not only were wolves a part of the stories and oral traditions but the wolves skills at hunting and their pack loyalty were highly valued and respected. Many tribes had warrior societies that used the wolf as their totem animal and would wear wolf skins when hunting.



Today wolves are still misunderstood by many people, feared and hated because of mistaken beliefs. Here are just a few of the modern myths about wolves:

Wolves will attack and kill people – there has not been a recorded human death caused by a healthy wolf in North America in the 20th century.

Wolves kill cattle – in fact wolves affect less than 1% of all farm animals. While a wolf is certainly able to take down a cow or sheep, they do not usually come into areas where humans are. In instances where wolves are attacking livestock, a guard dog is usually sufficient to keep the wolves at bay.

Many wolves have rabies - Wolves along with all other mammals can be carriers of rabies. However very few wolves have ever been reported to have rabies. Most cases of rabies occur in animals such as raccoons, foxes and skunks.

Wolves will eat all the deer and other ‘game species’ - Deer, elk, beaver and wolves have lived together for thousands of years. As a result of hunting by humans the natural balance of these animals has been changed causing the number of wolves to decline or even disappear in places.



Wolf Species of the World

Throughout the world there are only three different species of wolves. In BC there is only one of these species, the grey wolf.

Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

- widespread in the northern hemisphere including Canada, Greenland, most of Europe, Asia and the Indian subcontinent.
- also called the timber wolf, tundra wolf, arctic wolf, white wolf, great plains wolf, buffalo wolf and Mexican wolf
- colour of fur can be black, white, brown or grey
- weighs up to 130 lbs
- there are five subspecies of grey wolves divided by where they live.

Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*)

- brown and buff coloured with red and black on backs
- lives only in south-eastern US
- only 100 in the wild and 200 in captivity
- actively being bred in captivity
- weighs between 40 and 80 lbs
- extirpated from most of its traditional range



Abyssinian Wolf (*Canis simiensi*)

- lives in Ethiopia, in Africa in high alpine areas
- also called Ethiopian wolf, Simien jackal and Simien fox
- only about 500 in the wild
- yellowish-red in color with white on their throats and chest
- average weight is 50 lbs
- found only in Bale National Park and is threatened by continued habitat loss



Confused Canines

Help the wolves by unscrambling these threats

1. ioahablstts

3. untshre

5. angzrvroegi

2. nosipo

4. sunham

6. htaeporglld

1. habitat loss 2. poison 3. hunters
4. humans 5. overgrazing 6. leg hold trap



Lost Wolves

Find all the wolf words in this puzzle

S O L N J H H D D D D K G D O E P W L Q
F S E Q W F J P E P N J S D E A B E Z K
C A E D D M D T W D A M E E C N S U L B
U E M N W M A P A D I H G K I J P T N Y
A M N G R P R E P E N N N A Z C R R J Q
P H R D R E S U T A I Z A F I A E Z U U
S P P I A T D I F T S T R S P E C P M U
I R T L A N H L M H S G N P O M A O S O
B X T E A W G R I W Y Q E T S E R O F B
E X R F L O W E V W B R D E E R N T Q I
H H V A S W T H R E A T E N E D I S T R
T U T A T I B A H E G B Z U G M V E H A
R U N D E R E D Z C D R U Q B H O K O C
S Q K T V B W K F A Y G E E M G R J W W
O P Y O E I Y I O X L F R Y X E E M L C
A I N I U R W V A G E P U O K O L A N Y
X W F G C A N I N E U B G R O N C M V H
B U B R X L U T C P S M K C F X U M L Z
K Y Z H V U F P J D S V S D C Z P A V C
S L H U N K M I Y K U O C V Q H I L X I

ABYSSINIAN	ALPHA	CANINE
CARIBOU	CARNIVORE	DEER
DEN	ENDANGERED	EXTIRPATED
FOREST	FUR	GREY
HABITAT	HOWL	HUNTER
MAMMAL	PACK	PAW
PUP	RANGE	RED
SPECIES	THREATENED	THREATS
TIMBER	TRAPPER	WHITE
WILDERNESS	WOLF	

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Wondering About Wolves?

~ The wolf's scientific name (*Canis lupus*) comes from the Latin words *Canis*, which means dog and *Lupus*, which means wolf. The name means 'Dog who is a wolf'

~ All the grey wolves in the world are the same species (*Canis lupus*). The two other species of wolf are the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) and the Abyssinian wolf (*Canis simensis*)

~ Some scientists believe wolves and dogs are actually the same species

~ A wolf's fur is hollow. This helps to insulate them in very cold weather

~ Wolves are listed as a **vulnerable** species worldwide. This means if steps aren't taken to protect them the number of wolves will continue to drop.

~ In the USA the wolf has been extirpated from 95% of its habitats. Extirpated means no wolves live in the area except in zoos.

~ In Canada there are about 60,000 wolves.

~ A wolf can eat 20 lbs of food in one sitting!

~ Wolves can sprint at 70 km/h

~ They can travel 45 km in a single day

~ Wolves' sense of smell is so good they can smell a deer from up to 2.5 km away.

~ Wolves account for less than 1% of livestock lost from farms

Threats to Wolves

In the past 300 years the major threat to wolves has been humans. Wolves' reputation in western culture has resulted in wolves being hunted and trapped until extirpated in many places.

Current threats to wolves include hunting and trapping for sport and loss of habitat due to human development and destruction. Wolves have been removed from 95% of their traditional habitats in the US and 15% of habitats in Canada.

Wolf Words to Know

Alpha: the wolf that is in charge of making decisions for the rest of the pack. There is usually an alpha male and female and they are often the parents of the rest of the pack.

Canid: A member of the taxonomic family Canidae, this includes wolves, coyotes, foxes and dogs

Extinct: No longer living anywhere.

Extirpated: Species no longer exists in the wild, may still be living in zoos or wildlife sanctuaries.

Habitat: the area where an animal lives. Habitats are composed of five things (Food, Shelter, Water, Clean air and Space)

Howl: method of communication between wolves. One wolf will begin and the other wolves will join in and answer.

Mammal: warm-blooded animals that are born live and nurse milk from their mothers. Also covered in hair or fur.

Omega: lowest ranking member of the wolf pack. May not socialize with the rest of the pack and is harassed and attacked by other members.

Pack: a group of wolves, usually related, that hunt and live together

Pack ranking: the order of authority in wolf packs. The alpha male is leader followed by the alpha female. Below these two are the beta males and females down to the lowest or Omega wolf.

Pup: name for baby wolves

Species: A specific kind of animal or plant. Example: The

Gray Wolf is a different species from the Red Wolf

Vulnerable (special concern): a species that is particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events. If care is not taken the species could become endangered.

How to Help Wolves

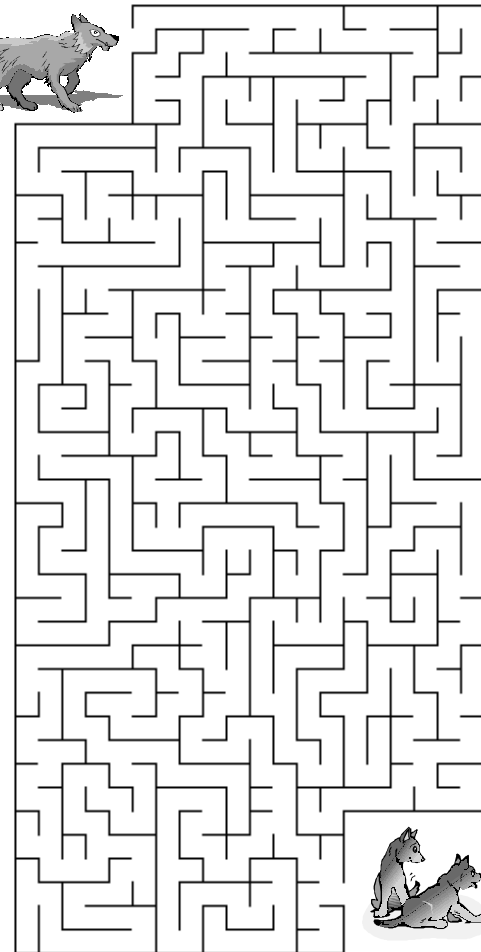
One of the best ways you can help wolves is telling your friends and family what you have learned by reading this newsletter. The more people know about wolves and how important they are the more they will want to protect wolves.

Adopt a wolf - Organizations such as Wolves Ontario! will use your donation to help protect wolves living in Algonquin Park, Ontario.

Write to your MLA and MP and tell them that you think wolves should be protected. Governments listen to people, especially young people who express an interest in their environment.

Wandering wolf

Help this lost wolf find its way back to the pack



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FOR EDUCATORS



Critters Credits

NEW!! Fantastic Frogs Wildlife Presentation

NWPS is proud to announce our newest presentation! Fantastic Frogs will explore the slippery world of amphibians. Specifically, we will introduce audiences to the 11 frog and 1 toad species living in British Columbia. Audiences will have the opportunity to explore the fascinating life cycle, habitat requirements, threats to survival, and positive steps being taken to preserve these animals.



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Exciting Wildlife Presentations:

Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society (NWPS) offers a variety of programs for audiences of all ages. These programs allow students to get involved in interactive classroom presentations. Our programs can easily fit into your curriculum, either as part of an existing lesson or as a separate lesson about the environment we all share.

Choose from...

- ~ Bats
- ~ Bears - BC & Beyond
- ~ Endangered At Home
- ~ Fantastic Frogs
- ~ Owls: Folklore, Fact, & Future
- ~ Urban Wildlife
- ~ Vancouver Island marmot
- ~ Wildcats of BC
- ~ Wildlife of BC
- ~ Wolves



Want to Get Involved with Wildlife Preservation?

Interested in preserving wildlife and wildlife habitat? Wondering what you can do? Join the Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society "Volunteer Team"! To find out more about possible volunteer opportunities with us, please call (604) 713-6686. There are lots of ways to get involved!

Want to Learn More About Wolves?

Visit these websites!

- Raincoast Conservation Society** - www.raincoast.org
- International Wolf Center** - www.wolf.org
- Wolf Trust** - www.wolftrust.org.uk
- Wolves Ontario!** - www.wolvesontario.org



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