

Wildlife Express!

Volume 19

Issue 9

May 2006

Wild Wolves



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Let's Look At...

the Gray Wolf

Ooowww... Owwww... Have you heard this sound in Idaho's forests? It can be a thrilling sound to some people, or a scary sound to others. But it probably means one thing - wolves are nearby.

Idaho has just over 500 gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) roaming our state. Howling for a wolf is an important thing to do. Howling is one way wolves "talk" to each other. A group of wolves may howl to locate other pack members, or they may howl to let other wolf packs know "we live here".

Wolves are very social animals. They like to live in family groups called packs. The average wolf pack has six to ten members. Packs do almost everything together. They hunt together, eat together, nap together and everyone helps to raise the pups.

If you look at a video of wolves, you can usually figure out which wolves are in charge. They will be holding their tails and heads higher than other wolves. The two wolves with the highest standing in the pack are called the alpha male and alpha female. They are the leaders. The alpha male and female are usually the only wolves that breed, so they are the parents of the other pack members.

Living in a pack helps wolves in many ways. Wolves like to eat larger animals like elk, deer and moose. A lone wolf would have a more difficult time catching and killing an elk by itself, but packs work together to catch the food they need.

Wolves have very good senses that help them to locate prey. Their wonderful ears can hear noises that are a mile away. They can also listen to two things at once! Wolves' ears move separately to focus on sounds coming from different directions. Just like all dogs, wolves also have amazing noses. Once a wolf figures out an elk is nearby, they will need to run to catch it. Wolves can run up to speeds of 40 miles per hour!

Living in packs also helps to ensure the survival of the pups. Pups are born about mid-April. Usually the pack will have four to six pups to care for. Pups see the world outside of their den when they are about four weeks old. When the pups are about nine weeks old, they are moved to rendezvous or gathering sites. These are safe places closer to food. This way the pack doesn't have to travel as far to catch food, but they still can give the pups the protection and care they need. By fall, pups are learning to hunt. They copy the behavior of the adults and learn where they fit into the pack structure. Pups will stay with the pack until late winter or spring. Then they have a decision to make. They could stay with the pack, or try and venture out on their own.

Next time you hear a wolf howl. Don't let it scare you. Some wolf may just be saying, "I'm over here."

Wolves of North America

Many different types of wild dogs live in North America. We have wolves, coyotes and foxes. In the wolf group, only two types, or species, of wolves live in North America.

One species is called the red wolf (*Canis rufus*). Red wolves used to be found all along the eastern and southeastern part of the United States. They got the name red wolf because their fur looks reddish.

The other wolf found in North America is the wolf that lives in Idaho – the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). Even though it is called the gray wolf, this wolf is not always gray. Gray wolves may be gray, black or white. Sometimes you may hear people call gray wolves Arctic wolves, timber wolves, Mexican wolves, or Canadian wolves. Even though people may call them a different name, they are all still gray wolves.

Inside of every living thing there is something called DNA. DNA is what makes you, you. Every species has a different DNA. Scientists look at DNA to see how living things are related to each other. They can see similarities and differences between species. When scientists looked at the DNA from wolves in North America, they found only two different kinds - the gray wolf and the red wolf. So why have the different names?

If we look at a gray wolf that lives in the Arctic, it may look a bit different than a gray wolf that lives in Minnesota. The wolf from the Arctic will be whiter in color and will also be a bit bigger. They are still both gray wolves, they just look a bit different because of where they live. Wolves that live in the Arctic usually always have a white coat. They need to be able to blend in with the snow to sneak up on their prey. A wolf that has a darker coat would stick out against a snowy background.



A gray wolf may change or adapt to its habitat a bit over time, but inside it hasn't changed. It is still a gray wolf.

Wolves in Idaho

For thousands of years, wolves roamed the mountains and valleys of the Northern Rocky Mountains. Elk, deer and vast herds of bison shared the land



and provided the food the wolf needed to survive. Animals were free to roam the land with little interference from man.

In the 1800s, trappers and fur traders came to Idaho looking for beaver and other animal pelts. Many of these early visitors depended upon wild animals for their clothing and food. As the United States population grew, people started to move westward. The west offered vast, open spaces to farm and raise cattle and sheep. This increased population put a strain on wildlife numbers. As elk, bison and other wildlife numbers dropped, so did the wolf's main food. Wolves began to look for other sources of food. They began to eat the cattle and sheep people needed in their lives.

People wanted to get rid of wolves to protect their cattle and sheep and protect the remaining elk and deer. Many wolves were poisoned. Wolves also had bounties placed on them. This meant that people were paid for killing wolves.

In Idaho, few wolves were left by the 1930s. The last known wolf pack was killed near the Middle Fork of the Salmon River sometime between 1928 and 1936. Wolves were removed from the West. They became an endangered species.

Where did the wolves come from that now call Idaho home? In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service captured 15 wolves in Canada and released them in Idaho. Another 20 wolves were reintroduced in 1996.

Wolves have reproduced and survived far better than experts predicted. In the last decade since they were reintroduced, the number of wolves in Idaho has reached about 512. Idaho has 59 wolf packs that spend all their time in our state. Nineteen other packs roam between Idaho and the states of Montana and Wyoming. In 2005, at least 123 wolf pups were born in Idaho.

Wolves truly have thrived. The gray wolf is no longer endangered in Idaho.

Hunt...



A predator is an animal that kills and eats other animals to survive. People usually think of large animals like wolves and mountain lions as predators, but predators come in all sizes, from big wolves to tiny spiders.

Would you think of a bluebird or great blue heron as a predator? Both are birds that eat other animals to survive. The heron eats fish, and the bluebird eats insects. They are predators even though some people may not see them that way.

The number of predators there are depends upon the number of animals they have to eat. The more rabbits there are, the more bobcats you may see. As soon as rabbit numbers drop, so will the bobcat numbers.

Predators are important parts of the ecosystem. They help maintain the balance of nature. We might be overrun with mice, if it weren't for predators. Predators also often eat sick animals. Removing unhealthy members of the herd helps to keep the whole herd healthy and strong.

Predators are sometimes seen as vicious or bloodthirsty, but they really are not. Predators kill for the same reason bunnies eat carrots – to survive. Wildlife acts instinctively (in-STINK-tiv-lee) or naturally. They have no choice. Predators have a job to do in nature, and they do it very well. Sometimes they reduce prey populations too much. When this happens, the predators starve, die of disease or move.

Living with Predators

We are lucky to live in Idaho. We have so many wild animals and beautiful wild places to explore. While you are out in Idaho's forests and deserts, remember wild animals live there, too. Some are large predators!

It is unlikely that you might be attacked by a bear, mountain lion or wolf. Like all other safety issues, the key is being prepared and knowing what to do.

Most people that have run-ins with wolves have their dogs with them. Your dog may be related to a wolf, but it doesn't understand how wolves' social structures work. Wolves are territorial. They don't like other dogs in their home, and that includes your pet! To keep your pet safe, remember these points:

- Keep your dog on a leash when in wolf country. Dogs running loose, away from people may attract wolves.
- If you let your dog run loose, bring a leash. That way you can control your dog if you see wolves, tracks or scat.
- Be sure to look for signs of wolves – tracks and scat. Wolves really don't like other dogs around their dens, rendezvous sites or food. If you see wolf sign, leave the area.
- If you live near wolves, keep your dog in a kennel or indoors at night. Wolves are most active during the evening hours and early in the morning. Don't leave food (of any kind) out to attract wolves, bears or other unwanted guests.
- Make noise or place a bell on your dog's collar. This will let wolves know that your dog has humans nearby, and they will be more likely to leave the dog alone.

If you follow these tips, chances are you and your dogs will





Managing Wolves

Now that wolves are back in Idaho, the whole environment is affected. All animals, even plants, will need to make adjustments. This includes people, too.

Wolves are a natural part of the landscape, but they have not been for quite some time. The landscape has changed a lot over the last 100 years. People have settled into areas. People often have dogs and livestock, like cattle and sheep, with them. This will lead to conflicts and problems between wolves and people. Wolves need to be managed.

How will the Idaho Department of Fish and Game manage problems between wolves and people? Sometimes people can frighten wolves away from livestock. Cracker shells are sort of like fire crackers that can be shot out of a gun. The loud noise they make will sometimes scare wolves away. Many other techniques are also used to keep wolves away from livestock. Livestock herders and guard animals seem to work best.

If wolves are attacking livestock or pets south of Interstate 90, the person that owns the land or livestock can kill the wolf to protect their animals. If the land the wolves are on is owned by the federal government, a person must have a federal grazing permit. He or she must also let Fish and Game know that a wolf was shot.

Wolves eat the same animals that people like to hunt and eat. Wolves can have an impact on elk and deer herds in some areas. If Idaho Fish and Game finds that wolves are lowering elk or deer herds too much, Fish and Game may be allowed to remove some wolves.

At this time, there is no hunting season on wolves. They are still considered protected under the Endangered Species Act. Once wolves are no longer on the Endangered Species List, they will probably be managed like bears and mountain lions.

Wolves are now part of Idaho's landscape, and an animal that we need to manage. As the wolf population increases, conflicts between wolves and people will happen. Managing wolves will always be necessary to help lower and reduce conflicts with people.

...or be Hunted

Animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals are called prey. Mice, insects, deer and rabbits are just some of the examples of prey animals.

Prey species are important links in the food web. They help to pollinate flowers and spread plant seeds in their droppings. A few prey animals are both predators and prey. A dragonfly may eat an insect and then be eaten by a fish. Weasels eat mice and may be eaten by great horned owls.

Prey species have adapted to survive in a world of predators. More than one type of predator may eat a prey species, so some prey animals need to have a lot of babies. This way they will make sure that some members of their species survives.

Prey may also live together in groups to help them outsmart a predator. It's much easier to see danger with many eyes looking than just one pair. By living in a group, female elk also have an easier time raising their young. Elk will baby sit for each other. One female will watch over the calves while the other mothers eat and rest. When danger does threaten the herd, the elk will be rested and ready to defend themselves and their calves.

It might be easy to feel sorry for a prey animal when it is eaten, but they are just playing their role in nature. Without them, who would predators eat?



First Impressions

Do you think wolves are scary, evil animals or cute dogs that remind you of your pet at home? Do you see wolves as just another wild animal, or as something more?

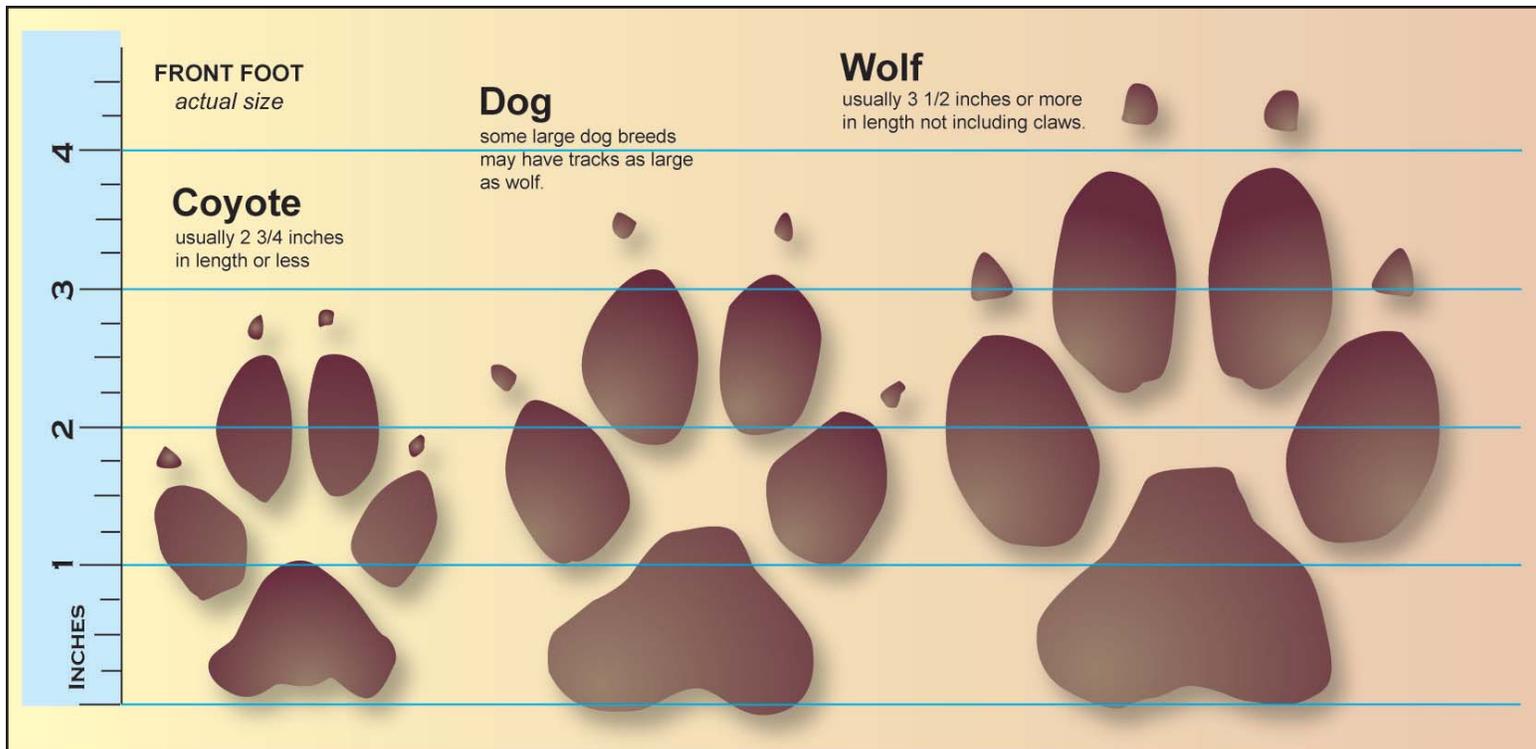
Throughout centuries, wolves have come to represent different things to different people. People see wolves differently based upon their cultures. Stories like [The Three Little Pigs](#) and [Little Red Riding Hood](#) are sometimes the first stories children are read about wolves. If this was the only information you had about wolves, you sure might come to the conclusion that wolves are not to be trusted.

Around the world there are stories about wolves being creatures of evil. Many of the stories were written and told a long time ago. Often people took an animal that they didn't understand or scared them and created stories about it. An example of this is the werewolf. There are a number of cultures which have were-creatures in their mythology. Usually the creature involves a large predator that hunts at night. Often the were-creatures take the form of the most dangerous animal found in the area. India has weretigers. Africa has wereleopards. The most famous of all are the werewolves of medieval Europe.

Not every culture sees wolves as evil. Many Native Americans see the wolf as an animal to respect and revere. Native peoples called a wolf their 'brother'. Great warriors, medicine men and chiefs took the wolf as part of their name. They saw the wolf as a powerful, intelligent and skillful hunter. The wolf's family and social life was also something they admired. Warriors believed that by wearing wolf pelts and making themselves look like wolves they could ride into their enemies' camps unseen. They thought they would be virtually invincible.

Wolves have meant many things to many cultures through the years. They're not evil or mean, but they're not friendly and gentle either. They're also not like your pet dog at home. Like all wild animals, wolves should be treated with caution and respect. They should be left alone and





Is It a Wolf?

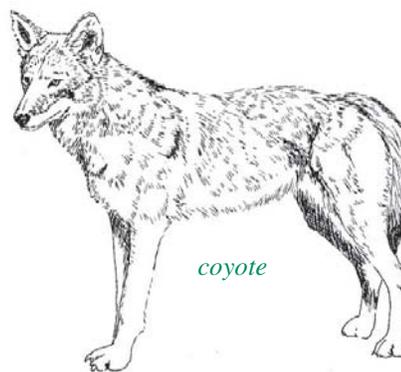
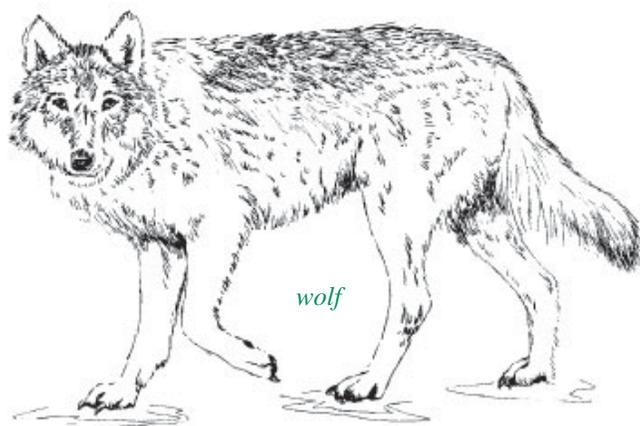
Have you ever seen a wolf? Through thick woods sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between a wolf and a coyote. Here are some things to consider when you are trying to figure out if an animal is a wolf or coyote.

When you think coyote – think pointy! Coyotes have pointy noses, pointy ears and usually point their tails down when moving or standing. Wolves have much broader faces, rounder ears and usually hold their tails straight out or at a 45 degree angle when standing or moving.

Wolves are also bigger than coyotes. An adult male wolf stands about 30 inches at the shoulder and can be over six feet long from the tip of his nose to the point of his tail. Males weigh an average of 70 to 110 pounds. Females are slightly smaller, usually 60 to 80 pounds. Coyotes stand between 15 to 20 inches at the shoulder and weigh between 18 to 30 pounds.

Wolves tend to travel the same trails that people do, so wolf scat (droppings) and tracks may be found if wolves are nearby. If you have a dog, you are probably familiar with what wolf scat looks like. Wolf scat is probably just a bit bigger than your dog's scat. Wolf scat is usually 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter with tapered ends. Usually there will be hair and pieces of bone in wolf scat. Wolf tracks are 3 1/2 to 4 inches wide by 4 to 5 inches long.

Next time you think you see a wolf, keep these things in mind. They will help you determine if what you saw was a wolf.



Wolf Word Search

- _____ wolves live in Idaho.
- Wolves live in family groups called _____.
- Usually, six to ten _____ live in a pack.
- The _____ wolves in a pack are the alpha male and female.
- A wolf gathering site is called a _____ site.
- Wolves _____ to communicate with each other.
- Wolves are _____.
- Wolves like to eat larger animals like _____, deer and moose.
- Wolves can _____ up to 40 miles per hour.
- Wolves are _____ than coyotes.

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

Words

DOMINANT
 GRAY
 LARGER
 PREDATORS
 RUN

ELK
 HOWL
 PACKS
 RENDEZVOUS
 WOLVES



WILDLIFE EXPRESS

Volume 19 • Issue 9 • *Gray Wolf* •
May • 2006

Wildlife Express is published nine times a year (September-May) by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Classroom subscriptions and an Educator's Guide are available for \$30.00 per year and includes a classroom set of 30 copies mailed to your school each month. Subscriptions of five copies or less are available for \$10.00.

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