

Gray Wolf



WOLVES 101

With their piercing looks and spine-tingling howls, wolves inspire both adoration and controversy around the world. Find out how many wolf species exist, the characteristics that make each wolf's howl unique, and how the wolf population in the continental United States nearly became extinct.

DID YOU KNOW?

It's believed that wolves were first tamed in East Asia about 15,000 years ago.

KEY FACTS

COMMON NAME: **Gray Wolf**

SCIENTIFIC NAME: **Canis lupus**

TYPE: **Mammals**

DIET: **Carnivore**

GROUP NAME: **Pack**

AVERAGE LIFE SPAN IN THE WILD: **6 to 8 years**

SIZE: **Head and body: 36 to 63 inches; tail: 13 to 20 inches**

WEIGHT: **40 to 175 pounds**

SIZE RELATIVE TO A 6-FT MAN:



IUCN RED LIST STATUS:

Least Concern



CURRENT POPULATION TREND: **Stable** →

DID YOU KNOW?

Gray wolves are the planet's most widespread large land mammals after humans and livestock.

ABOUT THE GRAY WOLF

Wolves are legendary because of their spine-tingling howl, which they use to communicate. A lone wolf howls to attract the attention of his pack, while communal howls may send territorial messages from one pack to another. Some howls are confrontational. Much like barking domestic dogs, wolves may simply begin howling because a nearby wolf has already begun.

Population and Conservation

Wolves are the largest members of the dog family. Adaptable gray wolves are by far the most common and were once found all over the Northern Hemisphere. But wolves and humans have a long adversarial history. Though they almost never attack humans, wolves are considered one of the animal world's most fearsome natural villains. They do attack domestic animals, and countless wolves have been shot, trapped, and poisoned because of this tendency.

In the lower 48 states, gray wolves were hunted to near extinction, though some populations survived and others have since been reintroduced. Few gray wolves survive in Europe, though many live in Alaska, Canada, and Asia.

DID YOU KNOW?

A wolf pack is two or more wolves that have a defined territory.

Wolf Pack Behaviour

Wolves live and hunt in packs of around six to ten animals. They are known to roam large distances, perhaps 12 miles in a single day. These social animals cooperate on their preferred prey—large animals such as deer, elk, and moose. When they are successful, wolves do not eat in moderation. A single animal can consume 20 pounds of meat at a sitting. Wolves also eat smaller mammals, birds, fish, lizards, snakes, and fruit.

Wolfpacks are established according to a strict hierarchy, with a dominant male at the top and his mate not far behind. Usually this male and female are the only animals of the pack to breed. All of a pack's adults help to care for young pups by bringing them food and watching them while others hunt.

DID YOU KNOW?

Wolves can go for more than a week without eating.