

GRAY WOLF

updated March 2017



! Status: endangered in Michigan

Range	Once the world's most widely distributed mammal, present distribution is more restricted: occur primarily in wilderness and remote areas, especially in Canada, Alaska and the northern United States, Europe, and Asia	
Habitat	Wide variety of habitats, from forests, taiga, tundra, deserts, plains and mountains	
Diet (wild)	Primarily hunt in packs for large prey such as moose, elk, bison, musk oxen, and reindeer/caribou	
Diet (captivity)	Dry dog food, canine diet, and occasional carrion or fish	
Description	Height: 26–32 inches; length: 5–6 feet; weight: 80–90 pounds. Males are generally 5–10 pounds heavier than females. Coat can vary from black, brown, gray, to almost white. Tail is straight; longer legs and feet nearly twice the size of a dog of comparable size.	
Lifespan	Wild: 8–10 years. Captivity: 10–12 years	
Reproduction	Gestation lasts 60–63 days and litter size ranges from 1–14 pups; the average size is six or seven. Pups remain in the den until they are 8–10 weeks old. Females stay with their pups almost exclusively for the first three weeks. Pups are cared for by all members of the pack, who are usually related. Until they are 45-days-old, pups are fed regurgitated food by all pack members; after that pups are fed meat. The young begin to hunt with the pack at approximately 10 months old. Most young gray wolves disperse from their natal pack when they are 1–3 years old. Breeding occurs between January and April.	
Behavior	Mostly active in late afternoon and evening, wolves live in extended family groups (packs) comprised of parents, yearling pups and pups of the current and sometimes previous year. The pack is territorial, using scent marking and vocalizations to define their home range, which varies in size from 40–400 square miles (48–478 square kilometers). Packs in forested areas occupy more stable territories, while tundra packs tend to be more nomadic as they follow migrating herds of antelope and caribou. Wolves hunt cooperatively to bring down prey much larger than themselves. Their principal enemy is man. Thanks to Hollywood, folklore and some novels depicting their "viciousness," wolves have been hunted to extinction in some areas. There are a number of reintroduction efforts taking place within the U.S. Continued threats to the worldwide population include competition with humans for livestock and game species, exaggerated concern by the public regarding their threat and danger, and fragmentation of habitat, with resulting areas becoming too small for populations to have long-term viability.	
Our animals	1 female, 2 males. Born: 05/2009 (female, Tala); 04/2014 (males [brothers], Kamots and Tikanni). Birth place: New York State Zoo at Thompson Park	
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their original worldwide range has been reduced by about one-third by deliberate persecution due to perceived predation on livestock and the fear of attacks on humans. In the lower 48 states, there are currently about 2,600 gray wolves, with nearly 2,000 in Minnesota. Alaska currently manages 6,000–8,000 gray wolves and Canada's population is estimated at about 50,000. The wolves in Canada are managed by provincial governments and are not currently threatened. • Wolves have a "feast or famine" biology that allows them to eat up to 25 pounds of food at one time. • Pound for pound, a wolf's fur provides better insulation than a dog's and won't collect ice when warm breath condenses against it. • Wolves spend an average of 8–10 hours of every 24 on the move, mostly during crepuscular hours. They travel great distances and have tremendous stamina: wolves on Isle Royale travel an average of 30 miles every day. • The largest wolf on record was 175 pounds, killed in Alaska in 1939. • Researchers long thought that modern gray wolves were ancestor to dogs. A 2015 genetic analysis overturns that hypothesis and suggests that an extinct type of wolf gave rise to dogs before the agricultural revolution around 12,000 years ago. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wolf's jaws can crush with 1,500 lbs/sq², compared to a German shepherd's 750 lbs/sq². • In 1947, a study conducted on captive, unrelated wolves was the foundation of the alpha wolf male/female dynamic which has become so ingrained in popular culture. This developed into the belief that dominance plays a key role in wolf social orders and that wolves are naturally inclined to dominate one another. A key problem with this study is that it didn't involve any study of wolves in the wild. Subsequent studies of wild wolves have found that wolves live in families: two parents along with their younger cubs. Wolves do not have an innate sense of rank; they are not born leaders or followers. Alphas are simply what we would call in any other social group "parents." Offspring follow the parents as naturally as they would in any other species. No wolf "wins" a role as leader of the pack; the parents just assert dominance over the offspring by virtue of being the parents. This doesn't mean that wolves don't display social dominance; wolves (and other animals, including humans) display social dominance, but it isn't always easy to boil dominant behavior down to simple explanations. Dominant behavior and relationships can be highly situational and vary greatly from individual to individual.

Phylum
ChordataClass
MammaliaOrder
CarnivoraFamily
CanidaeGenus
Canisspecies
C. lupus