

Name _____ Date _____

Wolves



Expert Group Text Set

Source 1: Wild About Wolves

by Public Consulting Group

1 When you think about wolves, what do you imagine? Do you think of the Big Bad Wolf, the famous storybook villain? Or maybe you think of werewolves, the fictional half-man, half-wolf creatures that come out every full moon. Those wolves might make entertaining stories, but real wolves are even more interesting!

2 Wolves are **adaptable** animals that can live in many different climates. In North America, they live anywhere from the Arctic areas of Alaska to the desert regions of New Mexico. Although wolves have many different regional names, there are actually only two **species** of wolf: red wolves and gray wolves.

Gray Wolves

3 Gray wolves are the most common and largest type of wolf. Once on the endangered species list, the gray wolf population is currently in a healthy range. They can weigh up to 175 pounds. Typically, gray wolves have thick gray fur. However, due to regional differences, there are also gray wolves with different colored coats. For example, the Arctic wolf is a gray wolf even though it has white fur.

4 Gray wolves hunt and eat large **prey**, like deer, elk, moose, sheep, and goats.

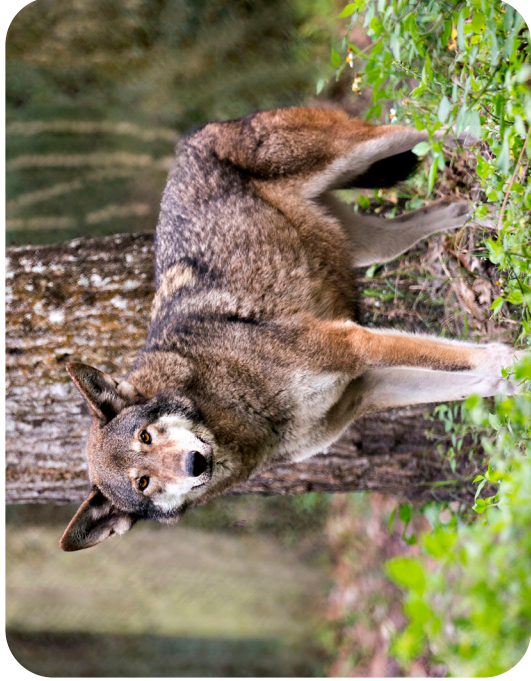
Red Wolves

5 Unlike gray wolves, red wolves are an **endangered species**. In fact, red wolves are considered critically endangered with fewer than 20 remaining red wolves estimated to still be living in the wild. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, there are also an additional 241 red wolves in captivity as part of the Species Survival Plan (SSP). The SSP is working to help increase the red wolf population.

6 Red wolves are a smaller species of wolf. Most grow to only around 80 pounds. They have thinner fur than gray wolves, and they usually have light-colored markings around their lips and eyes. Red wolves have pointy ears, slim faces, and slender bodies. They are commonly mistaken for coyotes. Scientists have discovered that red wolves are more closely related to coyotes than they are to gray wolves!

7 Like gray wolves, red wolves are also **carnivores**. However, they eat much smaller animals such as insects and rabbits. Sometimes, red wolves also will eat plants such as berries as a supplement to their diet.





8 Unlike gray wolves, red wolves are found living in the wild only in a small area of North Carolina. They used to range across the eastern United States, but as the population declined, their range became smaller.

9 Wolves play an important role in the ecosystem. They help maintain a balance between predators and prey. Both red wolves and gray wolves have benefitted from the Endangered Species Act, which helps protect species that are in danger of becoming extinct.

Glossary

adaptable (adj.) – able to adjust or change to new situations

species (n.) – groups of living things that can exchange DNA

prey (n.) – an animal that is killed by another for food

endangered species (n.) – a species of animal or plant that is at risk of extinction

carnivores (n.) – animals that eat other animals

Source 2: Why Wolves Howl (and Other Fun Facts!)

by Public Consulting Group

10 Gray wolves are beautiful, intelligent, and loyal animals, which has made them popular in pop culture. In the last decade, wolves have been featured in several movies and television shows. As wolves have become more popular, some misconceptions have become commonplace too. Below is a list of a few important facts (and mix-ups!) to know about wolves.

Fact or Fiction: Wolves cry out of sadness.

11 Fiction. Not quite! Scientists have not been able to prove a connection between a wolf's howl and its emotions. Wolves seem to howl as a way of communicating with each other, especially when they are spread out across an area. A wolf's howl can give information about their location, approaching predators, or nearby prey.



Fact or Fiction: Not all gray wolves are gray.

- 12 Fact. Believe it or not, this is a fact! There are several variations within the gray wolf **species**. Arctic wolves are white in color even though they are part of the gray wolf family. Wolves' fur provides **camouflage** in their environment, so it usually matches the colors where they live.

Fact or Fiction: Most wolves live in packs.

- 13 Fact. Wolves are highly social animals. Given the opportunity, almost all wolves will choose to live in and hunt in packs, although they can survive alone. A wolf pack is typically made up of a family of wolves that are closely related with an "alpha wolf" running the pack. Scientists used to think wolves competed for this role, but they now know that the leaders of a pack are the parents! Since packs are generally made up of family members, the mating male and female (or dad and mom) are usually the leaders of the pack.

Fact or Fiction: Dogs and wolves are very similar.

- 14 Both! While dogs and wolves are closely related, there are also several important differences between them. First, dogs are domesticated animals, which means they rely on humans for food, water, and shelter instead of finding them in the wild. Wolves, on the other hand, are wild animals that hunt for their prey. Additionally, many wolves have yellow eyes while dogs have blue or brown eyes. Wolves use their signature howling noise to communicate, but dogs generally bark or "woof."

Fact or Fiction: Gray wolves are no longer endangered.

- 15 Fact (for now). Gray wolves are no longer considered an endangered species. However, they are still in need of protection. Without protections in place, the wolf population is in danger of decreasing again. Many wolves are still being hunted. In addition, wolf habitats are being destroyed as land continues to be developed.

Glossary

species (n.) – group of living things that can exchange DNA
camouflage (v.) – when animals blend into their surroundings

Source 3: An Important Predator

by Public Consulting Group

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In the early 1900s, scientists learned a hard lesson about the importance of wolves.



17 At that time, there were no laws in place to protect the wildlife. Hunters were able to hunt any animal they came across. In addition, across the country, wolves, coyotes, and other predators were causing problems for farmers and ranchers. They were attacking **domestic** animals, including cows. Farmers and ranchers wanted help protecting their animals. As a result, the government created a predator control program that allowed people to hunt wolves and other predators.

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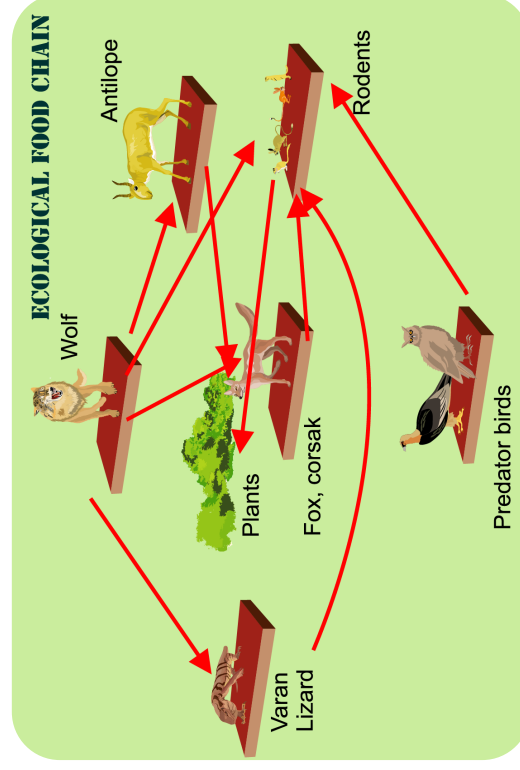
The predator control program—along with spirited hunters—almost completely **extinguished** the gray wolf population. By the mid-1900s, there were only a few wolf packs reported across the entire United States.

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The effects of the predator control program became especially clear in Yellowstone National Park. Without wolves, the ecosystem of Yellowstone started to change. Wolves had been the top predator in the park. With wolves removed from the food chain, everything else was out of balance.

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The populations of elk, coyotes, and other animals that had been part of the wolves' diet began to skyrocket. Then, as those animals took over the park, trees and plants were destroyed by overgrazing. This affected small animals such as birds and rodents that depended on the grass, seeds, and trees.



- 21 Around 1966, people realized that without wolves, the ecosystem was out of balance and the gray wolf was one of the first animals to be listed as endangered as part of the Endangered Species Preservation Act. Even with this protection, it took a long time for the gray wolf numbers to increase.
- 22 In the early 1990s, government officials came up with a plan to introduce more wolves into Yellowstone. Officials captured 14 wolves and released them into the park. Then, they added another group of wolves the following year. These wolves were able to successfully reproduce and expand their packs. In 2020, there were approximately 123 wolves in Yellowstone.
- 23 Introducing wolves back into the park was an important part of restoring balance in the ecosystem and the food chain at Yellowstone. In the time since the wolves' return, the populations of their prey have decreased. This has helped ensure that the plants and animals living in the park have the food they need to survive.
- 24 Gray wolves are no longer considered an endangered species in the United States. However, environmentalists say that they still need to be protected. In order to keep wolves' ecosystems in balance, it is essential for people to recognize the important role wolves play in the environment and help keep them safe.

Glossary

domestic (adj.) – living with humans instead of in the wild

extinguished (v.) – to put an end to