Mixed Up Meat Eaters

Unscramble the names of some of Ontario's other carnivores. Answers are found at the bottom of this page.

clakb arbe _____
toyoce _____
erd oxf _____
mentar _____
shrife _____
mernie _____
knim _____
verri rotte _____
einvolwer _____
grabed _____

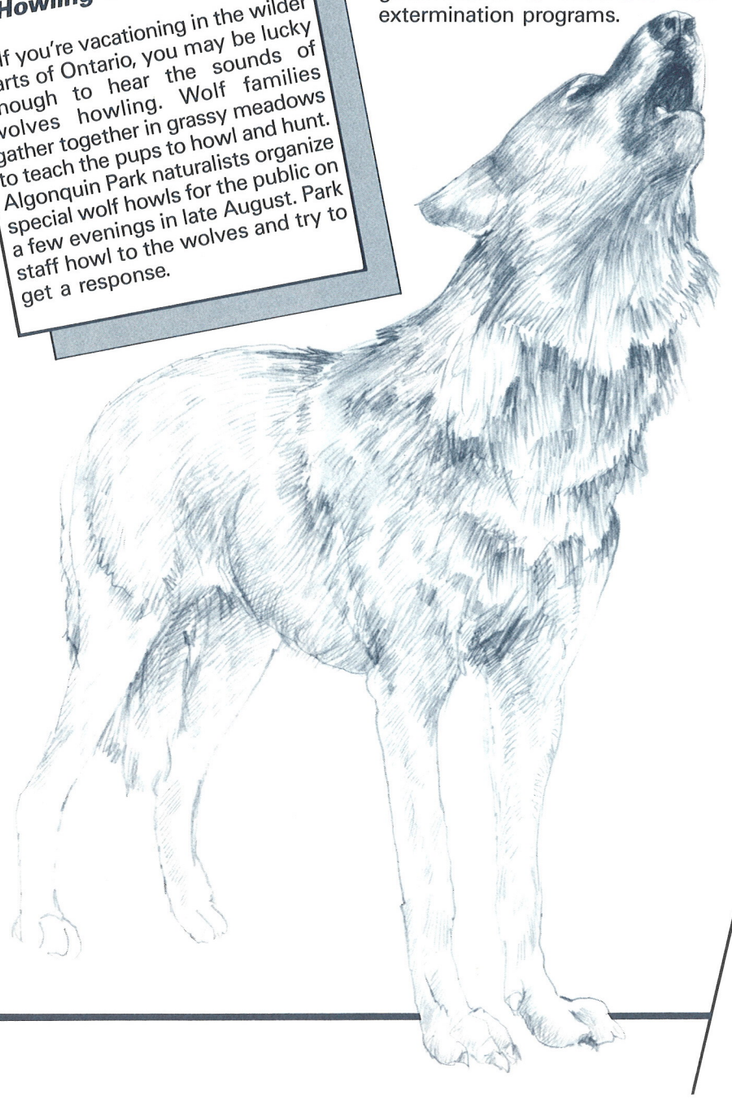
A Howling Good Time

If you're vacationing in the wilder parts of Ontario, you may be lucky enough to hear the sounds of wolves howling. Wolf families gather together in grassy meadows to teach the pups to howl and hunt. Algonquin Park naturalists organize special wolf howls for the public on a few evenings in late August. Park staff howl to the wolves and try to get a response.

Conservation

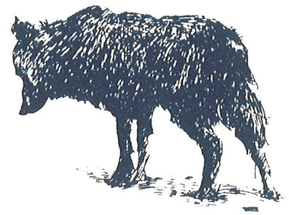
As people began to move into wilderness areas, they were, of course, also moving in to wolf territories. People felt that wolves were competing with them for game, such as deer and moose, and that wolves were a threat to livestock. This began a history of wolf killings that continues in some places today.

Although biologists disagree as to whether wolves have a serious impact on the populations of game species, recent research indicates that in most situations, the answer is that they don't. However, traditional dislike for wolves, misinformation and pressure from farmers and hunters has led many governments to undertake wolf extermination programs.



In Ontario, wolves may be shot year-round by anyone with a small game license and may be trapped for their fur, as well. Ontario used to pay a bounty for wolves (bounty is money paid for a dead wolf). In 1972, the province stopped paying bounty, but individual municipalities continued. In 1980 all wolf and coyote bounties were declared illegal, however many councils still offer them. **How can you help?** Phone or write to your local town and county councils and find out whether they are still paying a wolf bounty. If they are, write to the FON and tell us about it. Address your letter to: Mr. R.D. Lawrence, c/o Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2W8.

Also write to the council explaining that bounties are now illegal for wolves and coyotes, and that they should not be offered. Try to teach them about the importance of living with wolves, rather than trying to get rid of them.



Wolf References

A Field Guide to the Mammals of America North of Mexico by William H. Burt and Richard P. Grossenheider, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 1976.

Getting to Know ... Nature's Children. Wolves. 1985 Yearbook. by Judy Ross. Grolier Ltd. 1985.

Mammals of the Canadian Wild by Adrian Forsyth, Camden House Publishing Ltd., 1985.

Answers:

ermine
mink
river otter
wolverine
badger
black bear
coyote
red fox
marten
fisher

Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2W8 (416) 444-8419, FAX (416) 444-9866

The Wonders of Wolves

Written by Pamela Hickman
Illustration and design by Judie Shore

There was a time when children almost never said the word "wolf" without first saying "big, bad ..." It's not surprising, really, when you think about how wolves are portrayed in stories such as **The Three Little Pigs** or **Little Red Riding Hood.** There are now many biologists and conservationists who are trying to change the image of the wolf from a feared, blood-thirsty beast to an accepted, natural part of the ecosystem. Movies like Farley Mowat's "Never Cry Wolf" are one way to help change fantasy into fact. You, too, can help improve the future of wolves by learning more about their role in the ecosystem and helping others to see that these beautiful, well adapted animals deserve our respect not our persecution.

What are Wolves?

The Gray Wolf, also called the Timber Wolf, is related to foxes, coyotes and domestic (pet) dogs. It is the largest of the wild dog family (Canis), standing 66-71 cm at the shoulder and weighing up to 80 kg for a large male. As the name implies, most wolves are gray, but they do vary from nearly white in the arctic to black in forested areas. Gray Wolves are often confused with coyotes. Check inside for easy identification clues.

Where are Wolves?

Timber Wolves used to range over the entire northern hemisphere, however large populations now only exist in Canada and Alaska. They inhabit wilderness forests and tundra, often travelling along game trails, forest edges and lakeshores. See the map for the Timber Wolf's Canadian range. Hunting territories can be 400 square miles or more, depending on the availability of food.

Wolf Ways

Wolves are highly social animals that live together in packs averaging eight members. Each pack consists of one breeding pair, their young and some others. The strongest male in the group is the leader. The packs hunt and play together, as well as protect each other.

Only the strongest pair in the pack mate, between January and March, producing an average of 6-7 pups in April-May after nine weeks gestation. The woolly-haired pups are born in an underground den and weigh about as little as a loaf of bread. They will remain with the pack until the following spring. At that time they may stay with the parents if the pack is small, but if it is big, they will leave and join other young wolves to start a new pack. Some pups may also attach themselves to an existing pack. Wolves can live ten or more years.

Hungry as a Wolf?

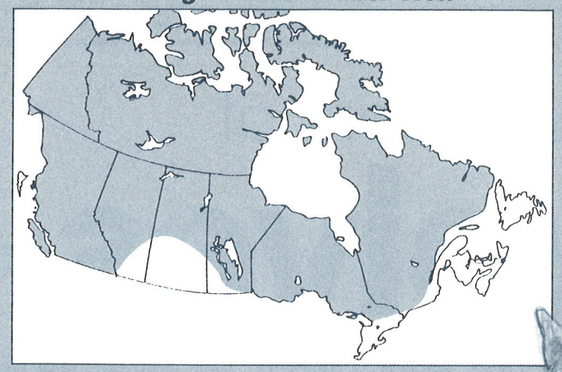
Like all wild animals, finding food is a major part of their daily routine. The pups start eating meat at two months of age and the whole pack helps feed them. Having caught some prey, adult wolves eat and semi-digest it, carrying it back to the young in their stomachs. When the pups lick the adult's jaws, it regurgitates the food for the young. This not only makes the food easier for the pups to digest, but it also prevents predators from following a food trail to the den. Food in a wolf's stomach doesn't give off a smell, while food carried in its mouth would.

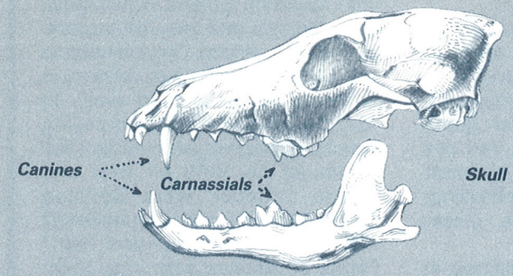
During their first winter, the young join the pack in the hunt. Often the pack will follow the same hunting routes over and over again, being most active at night. Some days, wolves may travel up to 96 km in search of food – birds, small animals such as rabbits, shrews, voles, mice, squirrels, beavers and muskrat, fish, berries, insects or large mammals such as deer, caribou or moose. Since wolves can live for several weeks without food, they also can "pig out" when a good meal is caught. An adult can eat up to 9 kg of meat at one time! That's like eating 80 "quarter pounders" at your local burger shop! No matter how hungry the pack members are, the pack leader always eats first and the others wait their turns. Uneaten food may be buried or hidden for later.

Call of the Wild

If you've ever heard the spine-tingling call of a wolf at night, you know that words cannot really describe the thrillingly "wild" feeling it gives. Contrary to popular belief, wolves do not howl at the moon. They may, however, howl to draw the pack together before hunting or to signal to another wolf pack nearby. When wolves hear other howls, they howl back as a show of strength – silence might be interpreted as a sign of weakness, encouraging one pack to enter another's territory. The larger the pack, the stronger it is, and the more it howls.

Canadian Range of the Timber Wolf





Wolf doesn't have reddish tinges.

Wolf or Coyote?

Wolves and coyotes are often confused in the wild. Here are some important clues to help you figure out who's who.

Wolf nose pad is larger (> 25 mm)

Wolf is larger.

Wolf carries its tail high when running.

Coyote carries its tail low when running.

Coyote nose pad is smaller (< 25 mm)

Coyote has rusty-coloured legs, feet and ears.

Hind paw print Coyote

Hind paw print Wolf

Walking tracks

Walking tracks

Wolf Language

Wolves have a fascinating communication system in addition to their howling. They use body language by moving their tails and ears, as well as adjusting their facial expressions. In fact, wolves are known to display at least 13 different facial expressions! Another way of sending messages is by leaving scent posts. A wolf will urinate on a tree or rock (just like pet dogs at fire hydrants) to tell other wolves their identity, sex and reproductive state, as well as to mark territorial boundaries.

Well-equipped Wolves

All carnivores (meat eaters) have pairs of special teeth called carnassials. These act as shearing blades, cutting against each other as the wolf opens and closes its mouth. The dog family also has a pair of incisors known as canine teeth which are long, curved inward and sharply pointed. All of these specialized teeth help wolves successfully capture, kill and eat their prey.

A wolf's hunting ability is also helped by its excellent senses. Wolves can hear high-pitched sounds beyond the range of a human's ear, and detect sounds up to 10 km away! Like your pet dog, a wolf has a great sense of smell. Its nose is estimated to be about 100 times as sensitive to smell as yours. Not surprisingly, good eyesight is also essential for survival and a wolf's keen ability to see movement ensures that it is well aware of nearby food or danger.

What about winter survival? In order to cope with the cold, wolves grow a thick, double-layered coat of hair. Long, coarse guard hairs keep moisture off the skin, while thick, short under fur traps air for insulation. In addition, strong tufts of hair grow between the wolf's foot pads, providing skid-proof soles for walking on ice.