

Yukon Wolves

The wolf's scientific name is *Canis lupus*, and it's the largest wild member of the Canidae family. Some members of the family include coyotes, foxes, and jackals.

Wolves range across the Northern Hemisphere, from the deserts of the Middle East to well above the Arctic Circle, from the vineyards of Italy to the treeless arctic tundra. Yukon wolves are among the few that still live in a natural ecosystem, that includes other large predators and prey species.

Quick Yukon Wolf Facts

- Weight:** Roughly 30-50 kilograms, with females averaging about seven kilograms less than males. A few males reach 65 kilograms.
- Length:** Up to two metres from nose to tail-tip (the height of a tall man). About a quarter of that length is the wolf's tail.
- Colour:** Wolves range from nearly pure white to jet black. About half are a mix of grey and white, with tan colouring on the ears and shoulders.
- Reproduction:** Females rarely breed before two years of age, although they're capable of breeding as yearlings. Normally the older females reproduce and breeding typically occurs in February. Litters vary in numbers, but typically four to six pups are born in mid-May.
- Diet:** Mainly large prey, such as caribou, moose, deer, elk, bison, and muskoxen. Also hares, foxes, beaver, muskrat, and smaller rodents, as well as birds, fish, and eggs.

The Social Life of Wolves

The typical Yukon wolf pack is seven to nine animals. The pack is made up of a dominant male and dominant breeding female (called the alpha male and alpha female), along with several non-breeding adults, juveniles, and pups. Each pack member has a place in the pack hierarchy, and when food is abundant there's little conflict among pack members. However, conflict in the pack increases with scarcity of food.

The wolves in a pack travel together, hunt together, and share the job of raising pups. Most wolf packs defend territories from other wolves, marking the trails and boundaries with urine and scat. The territories can cover over 1,000 square kilometres, although areas can vary widely, depending on the regional abundance of prey. The exception is places like the North Yukon, where the wolves follow migratory caribou, rather than sticking to a set territory.

The Wolf as Hunter

Wolves can travel 40 kilometres in a day, loping along at about eight kilometres an hour. If they're in a hurry, they can hit speeds over 60 kilometres an hour. No matter how fast they are, though, the animals they hunt are usually faster—and larger. Although single wolves have been known to bring down prey as large as a moose, hunting in groups of two or greater is more effective.

The pack stalks its prey and, when the animal bolts, the wolves rush it. If they're lucky, or if the prey is small or weak, they might take it down right away. If not, they settle in for the chase. Packs have been recorded to chase their prey for eight kilometres, but most chases are shorter. They end either with a kill or with the wolves giving up and moving on to the next hunt.

How much meat does a wolf need? It depends on where the wolf lives, how far it travels, whether it's helping raise pups, and a range of other factors. In the southern Yukon in winter, a wolf pack can kill a moose every four to six days, taking two or three days to eat most of it. Over the course of the winter, a pack might take 20 to 50 moose, depending on the size of the pack.

For Further Information:

Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee

PO Box 31280

Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5P7

www.yukonwolfplan.ca