

## INFORMATIVE—RESEARCH

**Unique Wolves**

Can you imagine hearing the howl of a wolf during the night? A while ago you could hear howls in northern Wisconsin, but the wolves were driven out. They were killing livestock for food, so ranchers really hated them. The federal government assisted the ranchers in eliminating the wolf population up through the 1950's.

Wolves are relatives to coyotes, foxes, jackals, dingoes, and our pet dogs. Some people mistake wolves and coyotes, but wolves are much larger and stockier. A wolf is like a German shepherd except with longer legs, bigger feet, a wider head, and a long, bushy tail. Like a dog, a wolf has very good vision, smell, and hearing, which allow it to track and kill caribou, deer, elk, and moose. Wolves sometimes eat 20 pounds of meat at one time with their 42 teeth. Wolves hunt mainly at night and early in the morning.

At birth, a wolf pup weighs one pound. At three weeks, pups start to eat meat. Each spring, wolves have six to fourteen pups, which are born in dens. A den can be a cave, the hollow trunk of a tree, a hole that the mother dug, or a thicket.

Wolf packs have eight to twenty members. The leader, called the alpha male, always gets food first, and if anyone butts in, they get growled and snarled at. Wolves communicate by howling, tail actions, and mouth actions. When wolves can't find food, they eat leftovers from other kills that they have buried, but they can go several weeks without food. Packs need 100 to 250 square miles to live in. Wolves can run up to 24 miles per hour. Most animals they hunt can run faster, but wolves can run tirelessly for hours and can leap as high as one-story buildings.

Wolves used to live all over North America, Europe, and Asia, but after the 1950's wolf populations survived only in northern Minnesota and Alaska in the United States, in Canada, northern Europe, and northern Asia. Wolves can live in any type of climate except for the desert and the highest mountains. Their color varies from pure white to jet black, depending on where they live.

Wolves are fun to watch and listen to. Now wolves are starting to move back into some of the lower 48 states; so go camping, and you might hear the wolf's howl again.