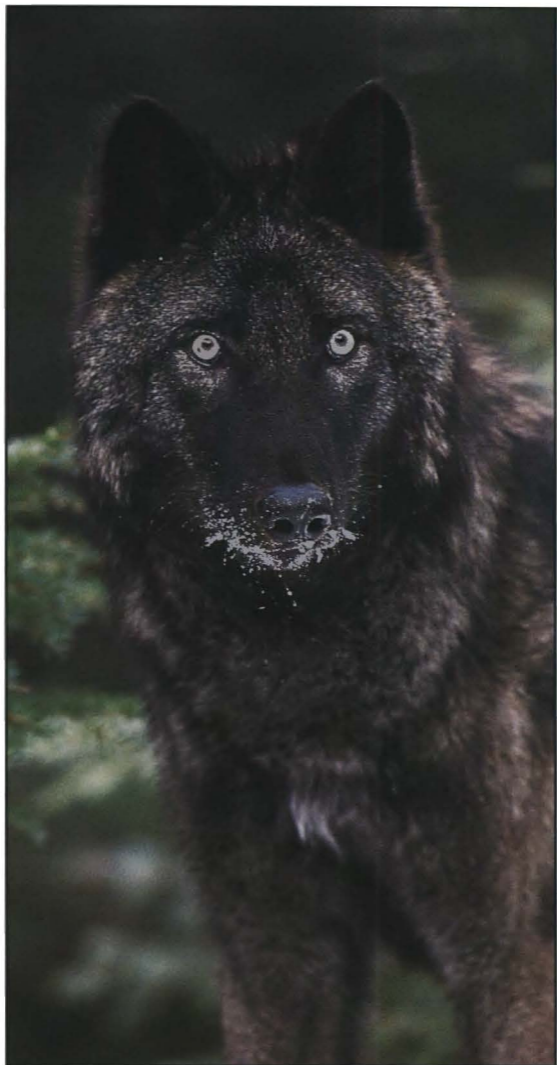


WOLVES

in Alaska



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Description



In Alaska, wolves range in color from black to nearly white, with every shade of gray, tan and even "blue" between these extremes. Gray or black wolves are most common. They are nearly the size of deer, standing about 30 inches at the shoulders. Most adult male wolves weigh from 85 to 115 pounds, but they occasionally reach 145 pounds. Females are generally 5 to 10 pounds lighter. Wolves reach adult size by about 1 year of age and generally live about six years.

Wolves breed in February and March, and pups are born in May or early June. Litters average about five pups. Pups are usually born in dens dug deep into well-drained soil. When pups are present, adult wolves center their activities around the den, though they may travel as far as 20 miles away in search of food. By August wolf pups are traveling with the pack and do not frequent the denning area again until spring.

Habitat



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Wolves can be found throughout mainland Alaska, on Unimak Island in the Aleutians, and on the major islands in Southeast except Admiralty, Baranof, and Chichagof. They range over about 85 percent of Alaska, from the thick rain forests of the Southeast Panhandle to the open arctic tundra along the Beaufort Sea.

Human Use



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Each year Alaska hunters and trappers harvest about 1,000 wolves. Most pelts are used in Alaska to make warm ruffs and trim for parkas. They are also sold, providing Alaska trappers living in remote communities with much needed winter income.



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Wolves are predators and, in most of Alaska, moose, caribou and Dall sheep are their primary food.

Life History

Wolves usually live in packs that include adults, subadults and pups. The social order in the pack is characterized by separate hierarchies among females and males. Fighting within packs is uncommon, with the hierarchy being maintained largely through ritualized behavior. Although the average pack size is 6 or 7 animals, packs may have 30 or more wolves. During winter, wolf packs tend to remain within established territories, which occasionally overlap with neighboring packs. Fighting between packs occurs during periods of food stress. In Alaska, the territory of a pack averages about 600 square miles. Young adult wolves often disperse up to 500 miles from their home territories.

Wolves are predators and, in most of Alaska, moose, caribou and Dall sheep are their primary food. In Southeast Alaska, Sitka black-tailed deer, mountain goats, beaver, and salmon are important sources of food. Occasionally, small mammals, including voles, lemmings, ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, beaver, and occasionally birds and fish, are also eaten.

The rate at which wolves kill large mammals varies with pack size, prey availability and environmental conditions. A pack may kill a moose every few days during the winter. At other times, they may go for several days with almost no food. On the average, each wolf eats about 12 moose or 36 caribou a year.

Management

The food habits of the wolf often bring it into conflict with humans, who hunt the same big game animals for food. Although the wolf has coexisted with big game animals for thousands of years, under some conditions the impact of predation contributes to prolonged scarcities of game. These scarcities can cause hardship for people. As a result, wolf numbers in a fraction of the state have been controlled in order to avoid relatively long periods of prey scarcity. In other areas, wolves are fully protected, and hunting or trapping are not allowed.

Research

State biologists monitor the health of Alaska's wolf populations by estimating the number and size of packs in selected areas of the state. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also conducts studies on the relationship between wolves and their prey and wolf population dynamics, among other topics. Wolves in Alaska are not threatened or endangered. About 7,500 wolves live in Alaska on hundreds of millions of acres of pristine habitat. Alaska is committed to maintaining a large and healthy wolf population.



Dollars for Wildlife

Each year, hunters pay a 10 to 11% federal excise tax on the purchase of firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. These funds are distributed to the states for wildlife conservation programs. Since this system was created in 1937, Alaska has received more than \$108 million in revenue from the tax on hunting equipment. This critical source of funding, called the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program, provides roughly half of the state's wildlife management budget, including about \$300,000 a year for wolf research and management. In addition, all proceeds from the sale of hunting and trapping licenses are used to support research and management programs. License and tag sales generate more than \$5 million annually.

This brochure was produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation.



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