



Wolves and People

There are thousands of wolves in Alaska and thousands of people who live, work and enjoy outdoor activities in wolf country. Wolves survive by preying on large animals, but aggression by wolves toward people is rare; much less common than aggressive behavior by bears or moose. Yet there are instances when wolves can threaten or injure people and pets.

Wolf Defensive Behavior

Unlike bears, which usually attack when they feel that they, their cubs or their food are threatened, wolves rely on their speed and quickness to escape a threat. Wolves may dash toward an intruder but then veer off suddenly with sharp barks and snorts. They may then retreat and howl if near a den, or they may hide and remain silent if flushed from a kill. Wolves are usually extremely aggressive only

in self-defense, such as when cornered, caught in a trap, or after being pursued. An injured wolf may act aggressively as a desperate last resort.

When wolves lose their fear of people...

Animals gradually lose their natural avoidance to people when they are protected from harm by people, or where humans act passively towards them. This is called habituation. Habituated wolves become 'comfortable' around people and may venture quite close to people. It is very important to understand that these 'habituated' wolves are actually the ones most likely to suddenly act aggressively.

Wolves also quickly learn that food is often found in human garbage. When wolves seek out human foods they have become food-conditioned. If a wolf is fed by people it begins to expect handouts. If that wolf approaches a person but gets no food, it can become suddenly aggressive. This type of aggression is probably responsible for many of the bites that wolves have inflicted on people in recent years.



Note oval form

Wolf tracks can be from 3 3/4" - 5 3/4" long and 3" - 5" wide. Their overall shape is oval, and they tend to have sharp, forward pointing claws.

What does a wolf look like?

People often mistake large sled dogs for wolves. The pelt color of wolves ranges from black to nearly white, with every shade between. Gray or black are most common.

Adult male wolves weigh from 85 to 130 pounds but they occasionally reach 145 pounds. Females weigh less than males and rarely weigh more than 110 pounds. Wolves reach adult size by about one year of age.



For more information

Contact your local Fish & Game office, or any of these regional offices:

Anchorage (907) 267-2257

Juneau/Douglas (907) 465-4265

Fairbanks (907) 459-7206

Nome (907) 443-2271, 1-800-560-2271

Website references

www.wildlife.alaska.gov

www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=disease.general1

www.epi.alaska.gov/id/rabies/default.htm

www.epi.alaska.gov/id/rabies/RabiesControlManual.pdf

Print references

ADF&G. 2008. Wolf Safety: How to live safely in wolf country.

ADF&G. 2001. A field guide to common wildlife diseases and parasites in Alaska.

McNay, M. E. 2002a. Wolf-human interactions in Alaska and Canada: A review of the case history, *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 30(3):831-843.

McNay, M. E. 2002b. A case history of wolf-human encounters in Alaska and Canada. *Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Technical Bulletin* 13. Juneau, Alaska.

First printing: January 2009

ADF&G administers all programs and activities in compliance with state and federal civil rights and equal opportunity laws. Obtain the full ADF&G and Americans with Disabilities Act and Office of Equal Opportunity statement online at www.adfg.state.ak.us or contact the Division of Wildlife Conservation at 907-465-4190.

Staying safe in wolf country



From the **Division of Wildlife Conservation**

of the **Alaska Department of Fish & Game**



Prevention is the best way to stay safe in wolf country

Keeping our children safe

We live in wolf and bear country, and these animals may pass through our neighborhoods and recreation areas at any time. This is not something to be alarmed about. If, however, there are repeated sightings of wolves or they are showing unusual behavior such as attacking dogs, approaching homes, or showing a lack of fear, then follow these sensible precautions:

- Keep your children close when wolves or bears are known to be near your home.
- Children (particularly small children) should remain close to adults when outside. The probability of a predatory attack by a wolf on a child is very small, but the possibility is highest for children that are alone near concealing vegetation or terrain.
- When camping in wilderness areas travel as a group keeping children comfortably close. Do not leave children alone in camps, even when car-camping in established campgrounds, parks or recreation areas.
- Although thousands of Alaskan children wait in the dark at bus stops, or walk to school in towns and villages, without incident, it is appropriate for school bus stops and children to be supervised by an adult when bears or wolves have been sighted nearby.
- Noise makers (such as air horns) may be helpful and should be placed in handy locations if you live in an area that is frequented by wolves or bears.

Discouraging wolves (and bears) from home and camp

- Keep a clean camp; don't dispose of food by dumping into the campfire.
- Don't leave unwashed cooking utensils around your camp.
- Keep food in animal proof containers.
- Don't leave garbage unsecured.
- Don't cook food near your tent or sleeping area.
- Don't allow pets to freely roam away from your camp.
- Don't bury garbage; pack it out.



In the rare event you have an encounter with an aggressive wolf:

- **Don't run. Aggressively lunge toward the wolf while yelling or clapping your hands, or retreat slowly while facing the wolf and acting aggressively.**
- **Stare directly at the wolf and don't turn your back to it. If you are with a companion, and more than one wolf is present, place yourselves back to back and retreat slowly while acting aggressively.**
- **Stand your ground if a wolf attacks you and fight with any means possible. Use sticks, rocks, ski poles, fishing rods or whatever you can find.**
- **Use air horns or other noise makers.**
- **Use bear spray or firearms if necessary.**
- **Climb a tree; wolves cannot climb trees.**

Protecting dogs and livestock

It is common for wolves to kill other wolves in territorial disputes. Wolves may also be very aggressive toward dogs, even when people are present. There have been several cases where wolves have come into cities, towns and villages around the state and killed and eaten dogs that were either off-leash or chained outside. Most cases occurred in winters where the wolves were having difficulty catching their normal prey. However, anytime a wolf pack resides near a human settlement, dogs or livestock may be preyed upon.

- Provide indoor shelter options for animals during hours of darkness. For example dog houses, sheds, or barns.
- Construct chainlink fences around dog yards and overwinter livestock areas.
- Erect electric fences around dog yards and livestock areas.
- Place lights around dog yards and livestock areas.
- Clear away a perimeter of concealing vegetation from dog yards and livestock areas.
- Use noisemakers.
- Have your dog(s) vaccinated against rabies.



There are no documented attacks resulting in human injury by wolves defending a den or a kill site.

Rabies and Wolves



Rabies may be present in wolves along Alaska's northern and western coastal areas where wolves may interact with rabid foxes. Usually only a small number of wolves are affected.

Dogs can also contract rabies from infected foxes.

You can get rabies if you are bitten by an infected animal, or if saliva or brain and nerve tissue from an infected animal comes into contact with your eyes, broken skin (cuts or scratches), or mucous membranes such as lips, mouth or nasal passages. If not treated, rabies is fatal in humans and animals, although symptoms may not show for several weeks. Any person exposed to an animal that may have rabies should *immediately* contact their local health provider.

Do not go near an animal you think has rabies. If you must kill an animal you think has rabies, do *not* shoot it in the head, or cut into a carcass you suspect may be rabid. Contact your local Fish & Game office, or the Alaska Section of Epidemiology in Anchorage (907-269-8000) to report any animals suspected of having rabies, and to learn how to safely submit samples for testing.

Do not eat the meat from an animal that has rabies, and do not feed any of it to dogs.

Wolves with rabies may:

- lose their fear of humans.
- have a glazed, poorly focused stare.
- stubbornly approach people, attack viciously, or make slow but persistent attempts to bite.
- have a staggering walk or trot.
- bite the ground or other non-food objects, such as sticks or rocks.
- not respond if hit with an object.
- salivate heavily or foam at the mouth.