

Wolf Packs and Communication

Wolves are social animals that live in packs and they have many different forms of communication. In addition to their most famous vocalization, the howl, they communicate with body language and other sounds such as yips, growls, and barks.

Why Do Wolves Howl?

Wolves howl for many reasons. One reason is to communicate over long distances with pack members that are far away or that have been separated. Each wolf has a different howl, just like we all have different voices. They may also howl to announce their presence to other packs in the area and to get an idea of the size of other packs of wolves or coyotes.

Howling isn't just for communicating your size or location, however. Sometimes wolves will howl to convey emotion and have been observed howling to grieve. Other times a short bark-howl may be used as an alarm call. And sometimes a wolf will howl if they see something cool and they want their pack members to check it out!

Do Wolves Really Howl at the Moon?

Despite popular portrayals, wolves don't actually howl at the moon. Wolves are a **crepuscular** animal, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk, so they are more likely to howl at night or early in the morning. They may also point their muzzle upwards to help sound travel farther and on flat land wolves can hear each other up to ten miles away! Before electricity was invented, humans usually avoided traveling at night unless there was a full moon to light the way, which may have led to the mistaken belief that wolves howl at the full moon.

Part of the Pack

A wolf pack is a family. The leaders of the pack, called the breeding pair, are the mom and dad, just like the head of a human family are the adults. The rest of the pack is made up of pups from the last few years and there may occasionally be aunts, uncles, and grandparents present. Wolf adults are quite lenient and gentle with pups, as it is understood that they are learning and growing, and they will teach the pups how to hunt and survive. Through play, pups will also hone their senses and hunting skills.

The average size of a wolf pack is six to seven animals. Wolves are social and family-oriented and there is rarely any fighting within the pack. When needed, they will work as a family to defend their territory. They all must rely on each other to survive. When pups grow up and want to start their own families, they will leave the pack and search for a new territory and a mate of their own.

