

What is a Wolf?

A wolf is a type of **canid**, which is an animal in the dog family. Different types of canids can be found on every continent except Antarctica, though the species vary throughout the world.

Canid Family Reunion — Let's Learn About Some Cousins

Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

The gray wolf is a canid that is devoted to its family. Different subspecies, or types, of gray wolves are found throughout the Northern Hemisphere. The famous recovery of Yellowstone National Park can be attributed to the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf (*Canis lupus irremotus*). The most genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf is the Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*), which is found in Arizona, New Mexico, and Mexico.

American Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*)

Did you know that North America has two main types of wolves? The most well known type is the gray wolf. The less well known type is the American Red Wolf, which used to live in the Southeastern United States. They are the most endangered species of wolf in the world. They live in packs just like gray wolves, but they have a unique howl that is more varied in pitch.

African Painted Dog (*Lycaon pictus*)

The African painted dogs have large rounded ears to help them hear and cool off in the hot African climate, and splotchy coats of tan, white, and black that help them to blend into their environment. Their pack sizes can range from a small family unit up to fifty members! They are very close to their families, which helps them to be successful hunters when competing with larger predators, such as lions and hyenas.

South American Maned Wolf (*Chrysocyon brachyurus*)

The South American maned wolf, nicknamed the “fox on stilts,” “skunk-fox,” and “fruit wolf” is actually not a wolf or a fox at all! They are their own unique species of canid. They have very long legs that help them to see over tall grass and urine that contains the same chemical compounds as skunk spray. They are solitary animals that hunt small prey, such as bugs, rodents and the pampas deer, but they also eat a large variety of fruits. In fact, their favorite fruit, the lobeira, is nicknamed the “wolf apple” or “fruit of the wolf.” And because maned wolves don't digest fruit seeds, they poop those seeds out as they walk around the forest, just like a stinky gardener!

Fennec Fox (*Vulpes zerda*)

The fennec fox is the smallest member of the canid family, weighing between two and three pounds. They live in the Sahara desert, where they are specially adapted to the harsh, dry heat. They have the largest ears relative to their body size in the whole canid family, and this helps them to both regulate their temperature and to hear prey under the sand. They also have specialized kidneys that are adapted to having very little water. In fact, a fennec fox might not ever find drinkable water, so they are adapted to getting the majority of their liquid from the food that they eat, which includes insects, rodents, birds, snakes, and cactus fruit. They are omnivores, so they eat anything they can find.