

# The hunter and the hunted

abundance of game, pup mortality, and on the behavior of the wolves. The wolf pack is hierarchical; the alpha male and female (usually the only ones) are the "beta" wolves, "outcast" wolves, and a few young wolves under two years of age.

The alpha male dominates the other females in estrus, and the alpha female dominates the other males, but usually with no blood-shed. The alpha male, although with not as much vigor as the alpha female usually leads the pack, and the alpha female usually leads the pack, where the pack will have to hunt for next time. The den location is an important factor in an error in judging where the game will be.

The behavior of the wolf pack is not entirely inflexible. The alpha male may be an alpha at certain times for a specific purpose. Usually one female becomes pregnant once a year, and the number of pups will be related to the availability of game in an area. The more wolves, the more pups. The wolves respond to stress in their environment by howling, and this will increase the pack's size.

The communication of wolves are maintained through vocalization, howling, and scent marking.

The howling of wolves, despite popular belief, is frequently on full moons. An illusion of howling at once occurs because each wolf howls at a different time. But the reasons for howling are unclear. It is caused by restlessness and anxiety, reaching a peak during courtship and breeding. The howl is heard at 10 to 20 kilometers away.

The howl is a warning or surprise, and growling as a sign of submission in some social context like food. High-pitched social squeaks are associated with play and curiosity.

The alpha male plays a role in asserting rank, and the alpha female plays a role in asserting rank. The alpha male is stereotyped, often prevents real fights. The alpha male may stand erect and still with his tail up, while the subordinate animal generates its tail, and flattened its ears back. An alpha male submission by retracting the corners of the mouth, "grin" or by laying on its back. The alpha male nips the alpha's muzzle is a sign of active submission. Similarly, "greeting ceremonies" of tail-wagging occur after the animals rediscover each other after a brief separation. The alpha male will nip subordinates, which seems to reinforce the alpha's dominance, but rather than being very tolerant and friendly. When they

are challenged and replaced by a new alpha, the memory of a violent past between packs.

By restricting the number of wolves that can live in one area, the wolves limit their own populations by territoriality and by their own social structure which control the number of births. Wolves simply cannot become overly plentiful. Their feeding habits and digestive systems are adapted to a "feast-or-famine" existence and to processing massive amounts of food in a short time. They can go without food for 3 to 4 days, then can eat up to 18 pounds of meat in one sitting, then get "meat drunk" until digestion is complete in 2-3 hours. They eat everything except the stomach and its contents. Even if their voracity causes a large number of moose, for example, to be eaten (for whatever reason), the wolves will only have less to eat later. The wolves are in balance with their prey, otherwise they would have long ago eaten their prey and themselves into extinction.

Ironically, our attempt to "extinguish" the wolf from our world also killed millions of other animals like raccoons, black-footed ferrets, red foxes, ravens, red-tailed hawks, eagles, squirrels, and wolverines. When people were poisoning the wolf with strychnine, arsenic and cyanide, all the others which share the wolves' domain also were killed. The wolf hunts for ecological investment, not like we, who hunt for economic and political investment.

By Chris Lohr

