

## **Arctic Wolf**

*Canis lupus hudsonicus*

### **Classification**

The Arctic wolf is one of the 38 subspecies of grey wolf, *Canis lupus*.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Canidae

Genus: *Canis*

Species: *lupus*

Subspecies: *hudsonicus*

### **Distribution**

The Arctic wolf can be found in the Arctic region in Alaska and Canada north of 70 degrees latitude.

### **Habitat**

This subspecies lives in the Arctic tundra where the land is covered with snow and ice except for a brief period during the summer months. They are also found in northern rolling hills, glacier valleys and ice fields around shallow lakes of the Arctic region.

### **Physical Description**

- Arctic wolves are three to five feet (90-150 cm) long including the tail.
- Males weigh 75-125 pounds (34-56 kg) and females weigh slightly less.
- Stand 25-30 inches (63-76 cm) at the shoulder.
- Arctic wolves have pure white fur and are smaller than other gray wolf subspecies.
- Has a long and lanky appearance.

### **Diet**

What Does It Eat?

*In the wild:* Musk oxen, Arctic hares, caribou, ptarmigans, seals and birds.

*At the zoo:* A special canine diet, dog chow, chicks, mice, bones, with horsetails and trout as treats.

What Eats It?

The Arctic wolf is a top level predator and has few, if any, of its own predators, although polar bears sometimes prey on the Arctic wolf.

### **Social Organization**

Arctic wolves are social animals that live in packs consisting of seven to eight related members. There is a highly complex social order in the pack and every member has a place within the dominance hierarchy. All wolves are aware of their position in the pack through communication with body posture. Every pack has a male leader, and usually only the dominant male and female mate but all pack members share in responsibility of caring for the pups. They hunt in packs and share the kill.

### **Life Cycle**

Males reach reproductive maturity at one year and females at about two years. Breeding occurs in late winter when the dominant male and female in a pack will mate. After a gestation of 61-63 days, the female gives birth to 5 to 7 pups that weigh about a pound each. The cubs are blind, deaf and helpless at birth and depend on the entire pack for protection. The pups are brown in color and their eyes open after about 10 days. The mother is very protective and other pack members aren't let into the den for the first two weeks. Pups nurse for about two months. After the early stages of development, fathers help raise young by teaching them to hunt and play. Life span for Arctic wolves is seven to ten years in the wild and up to 17 years in captivity.

### **Adaptations**

#### **Brrr!! It's Cold**

Arctic wolves have an undercoat and overcoat of fur which together provide insulation and allow them to survive temperatures of -30 degrees Fahrenheit or colder through the winter months. Thick pads on their feet prevent freezing, and their short muzzle and small ears help prevent heat loss. They also have shorter legs and a bulkier body than other wolves which helps them retain heat.

### **Can You See Me Now?**

Unlike other gray wolves that live in temperate climates, the Arctic wolf has pure white fur that helps to camouflage the wolf. There isn't much vegetation to provide cover for these wolves when they are hunting, and their white fur helps hide them while they stalk prey.

### **Hello, Hello!**

Wolves have a few different methods of communication. Wolves howl for many reasons. Howls can signal the location of pack members or bring pack members together for a hunt. Howling can warn neighboring wolves away from the pack's territory. Wolves also use scent marking to communicate their presence and territory boundaries to other wolves. Within the pack, facial expressions and body postures communicate emotions and status in the pack hierarchy.

### **Arctic Survival**

Life in a pack is extremely important to the survival of Arctic wolves in the harsh conditions in the tundra. Hunting together allows Arctic wolves to kill larger prey including musk oxen and caribou. Wolves demonstrate intelligence in choosing prey: they look for old, sick, or weak animals that are easier to catch.

### **Conservation Connection**

*IUCN Status: Least Concern.*

The Arctic wolf is the only subspecies that is not threatened and is still found over the entirety of its original range. The Arctic wolf remains unthreatened largely because they inhabit some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. They are the only subspecies of wolf not threatened or endangered because their remote habitat protects them from both habitat destruction and hunting.

### **Fun Facts**

- Wolf pups are always born with blue eyes that change to a golden or brown color.
- Wolves can eat up to 20 pounds (9 kg) of meat at one meal.
- Wolves are similar to lions in their social structure and hunting techniques.
- Wolf howls can be heard over five miles away.

