

Dear backcountry resident,

We are continuing a public survey of wolf observations in Central Idaho that was initiated last year. The purpose of the survey is to obtain information relating to the occurrence and distribution of the gray wolf in central Idaho. We are asking for your assistance in continuing this task.

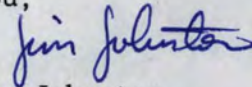
Included with this letter is information which describes wolves and characteristics that distinguish them from coyotes and domestic dogs. If you see a wolf or sign that you believe to be that of wolf, please call the wolf survey team at: 364-4210. You may call collect between 8am and 5pm or leave a message on our answering machine with the following information:

1. Your name and address
2. A telephone number
3. The date and location of the wolf or sign that you saw. (Please be specific about location.)

Or you may write to: Idaho wolf survey
Boise National Forest
1750 Front St.
Boise, Id 83702

Since we may decide to follow up on your lead, please give us this information as soon as possible. Your effort will be extremely useful in helping us determine the presence and distribution of the gray wolf in Idaho.

Thank you,



Jim Johnston
survey coordinator

Dear Jim & Holly,

How are things on Big Cr? Hope this note finds you both in good health and having a good summer - that includes Golda.

I finally got this survey contract, thanks to Wayne, and that should keep me busy into winter. It's the first office job of my life and just the thought of places like Taylor R. and the backcountry make my heart yearn.

I'm getting out once in a while to help a volunteer trapper try to get pictures of the wolf with an infra-red camera set up. So that part of it has allowed me some fresh air.

Carol told me that the sheep are giving you a run for your money - really sounds exciting. →

for letter

Dec. 11 - 1881

I have no papers on this case. I have only a few
 notes in my pocket book and a few scraps of paper.
 I have not yet had time to look them over. I
 should like to see you very much and to
 hear of your trip to the West. I hope you
 will have a very successful one. I have
 not yet received your letter of the 21st. I
 am sorry to hear that you are going to
 leave. I wish you could stay longer. I
 am very truly,
 your friend,
 J. H. P.

RECOGNIZING WOLVES

Distinguishing between wolves and large dogs or coyotes is not always easy, especially under poor light conditions or when the animal is only seen for an instant. Positive identification of a wolf is best made by skull measurements, however this method is not practical in field identification. When a wild canid is seen, the observer should be alert to several key characteristics that can aid in distinguishing wolves from coyotes or various dog breeds:

Size

Wolves generally weigh from 80 to 100 lbs. (36 to 45 kg.), with females being slightly smaller. They range from 4.5 to 6.5 ft. (1.4 to 2 m.) from tip of the nose to tail and stand 26 to 32 in. (67 to 82 cm.) high at the shoulders; coyotes only 16 to 20 in. high. Wolves have longer legs and proportionally larger feet than coyotes or dogs. On first glance observers often think a wolf is a deer.

Color

Colors range from white, cream, tawny, various shades of gray, to black. Often the belly and legs are lighter and the back and top of tail darker than the rest of the body. Coyotes exhibit more reddish coloration.

Tail

Wolves' tails are generally 13 to 20 in. (33 to 51 cm.) long and are bushy. They are usually hanging down or straight out behind rather than held high or curled as is often the case with dogs.

Face

Wolves have long snouts, generally longer than most dogs' and broader than coyotes' snouts. Their ears are rounder at the tips and smaller in proportion to the head than a coyote's which appear larger and more pointed. Another distinctive facial feature of the wolf is the tufts of fur that project outward and downward from the base of the ears outlining the face.

READING WOLF SIGN

In your outdoor work or recreation in remote areas you may occasionally come across tracks, a scat, or some other sign that a wolf has passed through the area.

Tracks

Probably the most common type of sign left by wolves on their wanderings is their tracks. Wolf tracks look very much like large dog tracks with four toes, a triangular-shaped heel pad, and definite claw marks (Fig. 1). Wolf tracks vary in length from 4 to over 5 in. (100 to over 125 mm.) including the claw marks. Width of wolf tracks range from 3 to 4.5 in. (79 to 114 mm.).

Other tracks sometimes confused with wolf tracks are mountain lion, coyote, and large dog. Mountain lion tracks are generally the same size as wolf tracks and also have four toes (Fig. 2). The main differences between the two are that usually mountain lion tracks will not include claw marks (although if they do, the claw marks will be closer to the tips of the toes than wolf claw marks), and lion tracks have an overall rounder shape than wolf tracks. Coyote tracks are similar in appearance to wolf tracks but are much smaller (Fig. 2). In soft mud or melting snow, coyote tracks may appear larger than they actually are and could possibly be confused with small wolf tracks.

Large dog tracks are probably most easily confused with wolf tracks. A study by Harris and Ream (1977) tried to determine whether it is possible to distinguish between the two. They found that most common dog breeds make tracks shorter than 4.3 in. (110 mm.). Of the dogs tested (St. Bernard, Great Dane, Irish Wolfhound, Bloodhound, Alaskan Malamute, and German Shepherd), three breeds commonly make tracks greater than 110 mm. in length: St. Bernard, Great Dane, and Irish Wolfhound. Figure 3 illustrates typical tracks of two of the tested breeds. Although measurements of overall track size cannot distinguish between dog and wolf tracks, ratios of some size measurements can be used to determine the probability of a track being wolf or a particular breed of dog. Several of the measurements used include total length to width of the track, and length and width of the heel pad to that of the inner toes. In determining whether tracks were made by wolves or large dogs, size is an important factor, but certainly not the only one. The probability of people in the area who might have dogs with them and the proximity of residences with large dogs must also be taken into consideration.

If you find large canid tracks in an area where dogs are unlikely to be and suspect that they may be wolf tracks, you can help by doing the following: 1) Measure the total length and width of the track (or several tracks) carefully. 2) Measure the length of stride, toenail to toenail between two tracks (in wolves usually more than 26 in. (67 cm.)). 3) Photograph the tracks including an object for size comparison. 4) If possible cast 3 to 4 tracks in plaster. Since most people do not carry plaster with them into the back-country, the track can be preserved for several days by placing a large can, bowl, or protective rock over it until a plaster cast can be made.

Plaster of Paris works well for casting tracks. At least 1 cup of powder will be needed to cast a complete wolf track. In a can, slowly add water to the powder and stir until the mixture is thick and pours slowly. A thin, runny consistency will produce a cast that breaks easily. Pour the plaster into the track filling all toes, heel pad, and claw marks. Let the plaster dry 20 to 30 minutes before gently prying the cast loose from the ground with a stick.

Scats

Scats alone cannot be used as evidence of wolves in an area because of their similarity to mountain lion and large coyote scats. However, if a sighting, tracks, or other evidence of wolves is found in an area, large scats should be collected to help make a stronger case for the presence of wolves. Wolf scats will usually have mammal fur and/or bones in them, be 1.2 in. (30 mm.) or more in diameter and vary greatly in length. Scats should be handled carefully, as worms and other parasites can be transmitted to people.

Howling

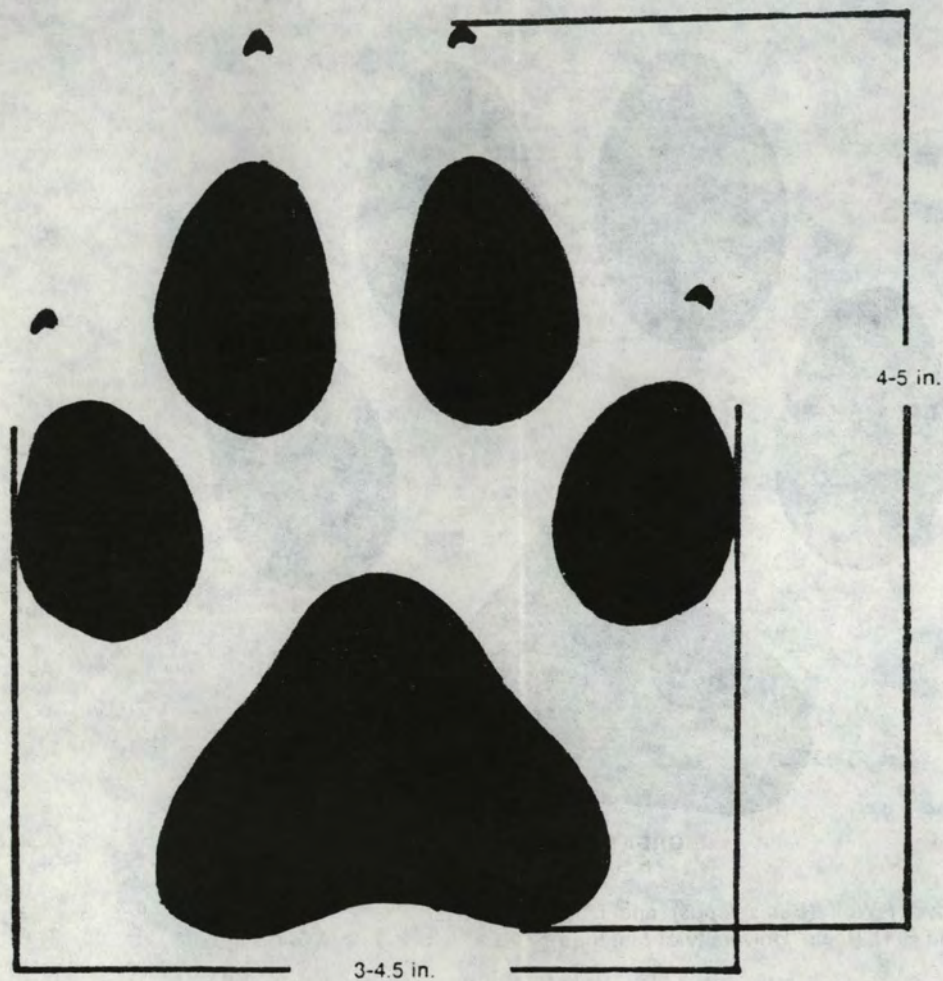
No one is certain why wolves howl—perhaps to gather the pack together or to advertise their territory to neighboring packs. The eerie, mournful howl of the wolf is usually heard at dawn or at dusk. It differs from coyote howling by being a single, long howl with pauses of a minute or more between howls. Coyotes usually bark and yip and yap before, during, and after howling; and their howls are often higher-pitched than wolf howls. If on some cold, gray dawn, or just before crawling into a sleeping bag at dusk you hear what you suspect is wolf howling, try howling back. Wolves will often answer a howl even if it is only a poor imitation. A record album that has numerous wolf howls in it is "The Language and Music of Wolves" narrated by Robert Redford and produced by The American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Dens

Dens of any wild animal are usually not easy to find unless you can track the animal directly to its lair. Wolf dens, as a rule, are close to water and dug into sandy, well-drained soil. They can be dug under boulders, in cutbanks, on ridges, or any number of places. The entrance is usually large enough for a person to squeeze through, and the passageway is several feet long with a chamber for the bitch and pups at the end. There is no bedding in a wolf den. If recently used, there may be bones scattered about and well-defined trails radiating from the den.

Information taken from:

WOLF IDENTIFICATION: a field guide,
by Robert Ream and Ursula Mattson,
University of Montana, Missoula



COYOTE TRACK

FIGURE 1. Typical wolf track: 4 to 5 in. long by 3 to 4.5 in. in width. From "A Comparative Study of Wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Dog (*Canis familiaris*) Tracks" by R. B. Harris and R. R. Ream, University of Montana.



GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG

GREAT DANE

FIGURE 3. From "A Comparative Study of Wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Dog (*Canis familiaris*) Tracks" by R. B. Harris and R. R. Ream, University of Montana.

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