

Distinguishing Between Coyotes, Wolves, and Dogs

IMPORTANT: Wolf pups in mid-summer and fall can closely resemble coyotes, and it can be nearly impossible to tell them apart.

COYOTES AND WOLVES BY SIGHT



Coyote



Wolf

These two animals have similar coat colors, but different facial characteristics. The coyote on the left has a narrow snout and small nose pad, with large ears relative to its head size. The wolf on the right has a broad snout and large nose pad, with small ears relative to its head size.





	COYOTE (<i>Canis latrans</i>)	GRAY WOLF (<i>Canis lupus</i>)
Face	Narrow and pointed; small nose pad	Broad and blocky; large nose pad
Ears	Taller and pointed	Short and rounded
Shoulder Height	21 to 24 inches	26 to 32 inches
Length	3 ½ to 4 ½ feet (nose to tail tip)	4 ½ to 6 ½ feet (nose to tail tip)
Weight	15-50 pounds	70-150 pounds
Coat	Gray or reddish brown, often grizzled, often with whitish throat, chest, and/or belly	Grizzled gray is most common, but can also be mostly or all black; white or cream coats rare outside far northern populations

COYOTES AND WOLVES BY SOUND

	COYOTE (<i>Canis latrans</i>)	GRAY WOLF (<i>Canis lupus</i>)
Vocalizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice typically higher pitched • Howls shorter, rising and falling in pitch • Usually interspersed with yips, yaps, and barks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice typically lower in pitch • Howling tends to be long and drawn-out • Can also include growls and barks

COYOTES AND WOLVES BY SIGN

	COYOTE (<i>Canis latrans</i>)	GRAY WOLF (<i>Canis lupus</i>)
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<p>Tracks</p>	 <p>Front foot with narrow lobe on main pad</p> <p>Hind foot with wide lobe on main pad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 ¼ - 2 ¾ inches long, by 1 ¾ - 2 ⅝ inches wide • Crisp edges, especially in summer when less hair is present • Long axes of the toes typically parallel • Main pad of hind feet distinctly different than that of fore feet • Claws of outer toes may not register 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 - 5 ½ inches long, by 3 ¾ - 5 inches wide • Very robust, especially in winter when extra hair is present between toes • Inner toes appear bigger than in coyote tracks • Outer toes, especially on fore feet, may tend to splay • All four claws typically show in tracks
<p>Scats</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually less than 1 inch in diameter • May contain ungulate hair, but more typically contain hair and small bone fragments from rodents, rabbits • Smoother, shinier appearance than wolf scat • May taper to a point at one end 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diameter ranges from ½ - 1½ inches, but usually greater than 1 inch • Often cord-like; may contain ungulate hair and bone fragments • Generally taper to a point at one end

DOGS AND WOLVES

Distinguishing dogs from wolves can be challenging. Many of the traits possessed by wolves can also be found in domestic dogs, so no single trait should be used to definitely distinguish a dog from a wolf. When observing an animal, it is desirable to consider as many of the following traits as possible, including the animal's behavior. Wild wolves will almost never approach a human.

	DOG (<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>)	GRAY WOLF (<i>Canis lupus</i>)
Ears		



- Usually large relative to head size
- Often pointed tips



- Small relative to head size
- Tips more rounded

Tail



- May curl upward especially when running or trotting
- No scent gland spot



- Does not curl upward even when running
- Precaudal scent gland marked with dark hair (may not be visible in darker animals)







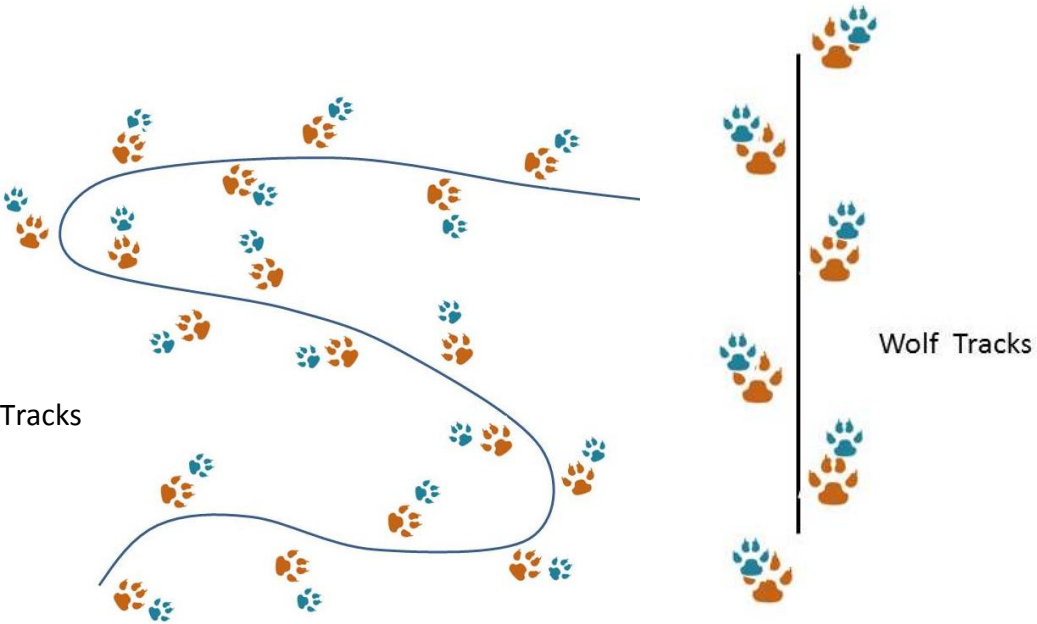
Chest



- Chest is broad so legs are separated
- Feet typically not splayed



- Chest is very narrow so legs are close together
- Feet may splay outward

<p>Eyes</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less slanted • May be blue in color 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner corners tend to slant downward • Never blue in color
<p>Scat</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size can vary greatly • Has a consistent appearance due to the consistency of commercial dog food • Often lacks a tapered end 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diameter ranges from ½ - 1½ inches, but usually greater than 1 inch • Often cord-like; may contain ungulate hair and bone fragments • Generally tapers to a point at one end
<p>Tracks</p>	<p>Hind foot </p> <p>Forefoot </p>  <p>Dog Tracks</p> <p>Wolf Tracks</p> <p>It can be impossible to distinguish a large dog from a wolf from a single track. Instead, if possible look for the pattern of the <i>trail</i> left by the animal. Dogs' pattern of walking reflects their domestic</p>	

	<p>lifestyle. They do not rely on stealth, and tend to walk erratically. Their hind foot tracks seldom register within their forefoot tracks. They may also approach strange objects directly. Wolves on the other hand, tend to walk more directly when travelling. Their trails reflect this, as the track of the hind foot is placed within or directly in front of the forefoot. Wolves will also approach strange objects cautiously, often circling widely to investigate rather than approaching directly.</p>
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