

# FOCUS

# Wild Arizona

## Key Words:

**Captive:** kept under human control, as in a zoo or cage

**Domestic:** tame, living near and with humans

**Life expectancy:** the average number of years a person may expect to live

**Mature:** to fully grow and develop

Have you ever heard that one year of life for a dog is the same as seven years for a human? Where does this idea come from? What does it mean?

In general, dogs tend to live much shorter lives than humans. As a result, they **mature** faster. Humans take a long time to develop from an infant to a child to an adult. This process can take as many as two decades. Dogs, however, move from puppyhood to adulthood in a couple of years.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a government agency that monitors the health of people, the average **life expectancy** of a person in the United States is 78.5 years. For our purposes, let's say it is an even 80 years. Dogs, on the other hand, live 12–13 years, on average. People live six to seven times longer than dogs, so we think dogs age faster. For each year a human lives, a dog ages by about seven years.

Of course, it is not that simple. There are many different types of dogs.

Some mature faster than others. So saying that one human year is the same as seven dog years is not entirely accurate. But it does provide an interesting measurement that can help us compare life spans.

When I use the word “dog,” I’m talking about pets. Arizona, however, has a number of wild dog species including foxes, coyotes and wolves. How do they compare? Do they follow the same 7-to-1 ratio **domestic** dogs do? Let’s find out.

## Do the Math:

It is extremely difficult to determine the average life span of wild animals. They can’t talk, they aren’t born in hospitals and they don’t come with birth certificates. Usually, we can only make an educated guess about their age. But this information can still help us.

Biologists have rarely been able to find a wolf that is more than 10 years old. If we assume humans live 80 years, then we just divide the age of humans (80) by the age of wolves (10) to compare. In this case, for each year a person ages, a wolf gets eight years older ( $80/10=8$ ).

Animal or Plant	Life Span (in Years)	How it Compares to One Human Year
Cottontail rabbit	2	
Burrowing owl	8	
Kangaroo rat	9	
Hummingbird	13	
Elk	15	
Black bear	18	
Kingsnake	23 (in captivity)	
Gila monster	27 (in captivity)	
Golden eagle	30	
Bobcat	32	
California condor	70	
Saguaro cactus	200	
Paloverde tree	400	



By Eric Proctor



GEORGE ANDREIKO

Kit foxes have been found to be twice as old as wolves, living up to 20 years. Using the same process, calculate how many years a fox ages for each human year. What is your answer?

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Coyotes live up to 14 years old in the wild. **Captive** coyotes, however, live as long as 21 years. This is not unusual. Captive animals tend to live longer than wild ones. Why?

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How many years does a wild coyote age for each human year?

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Captive?

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■ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Focus Wild Arizona program, a free educational program for teachers, parents, students or anyone interested in learning about wildlife and habitat. Visit our website, [www.azgfd.gov/focuswild](http://www.azgfd.gov/focuswild), to find exciting lessons and resources.

There does not appear to be a major difference between the aging of domestic dogs and wild dogs. But what about other animals? What about plants? Just for fun, let's take a look at a chart with the life span of a variety of Arizona plants and animals (Page 42). Use the same process to calculate how many years they age for each human year. Write the answers in the right column.

### Critical Thinking:

Although the current life expectancy of a person in the United States is 78.5 years, this wasn't always the case. About 100 years ago, the average life span was about 50 years.

What do you think might explain why people live longer now?

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Do you think we have seen a similar increase in animal life spans? Why or why not? 🦋

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