



Mexican Gray Wolf

*Endangered Species Reintroduction
Released March 1998, Apache National Forest, AZ*

Photograph by George Andrejko, Arizona Game and Fish Department



What is a wolf?

Wolves are members of the Canid family, which includes foxes, coyote, wolves, and domestic dogs. Canids have lived in Arizona for thousands of years. *Canis lupus*, the gray wolf, and *Canis dirus*, the Dire wolf, coexisted in the Southwest. However, the Dire wolf became extinct approximately 17,000 years ago.

Look for any of these canids while you are in “Mexican wolf country”.

Gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

- 30-45 inches (76-114 cm.) in length (including tail)
- 7-13 pounds (3.2 – 5.8 kg.)
- Salt-and-pepper coat, light underfur, long bushy tail tipped with black and featuring a black stripe down the middle
- Usually nocturnal and secretive. Will climb trees to escape predators.

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

- 43-54 inches (110 – 135 cm) in length (including tail)
- 20-50 pounds (9-22 kg.)
- Gray/reddish gray with “rusty” legs, feet, ears and whitish throat and belly
- Largely nocturnal but may be active at any time. Holds tail down when running.

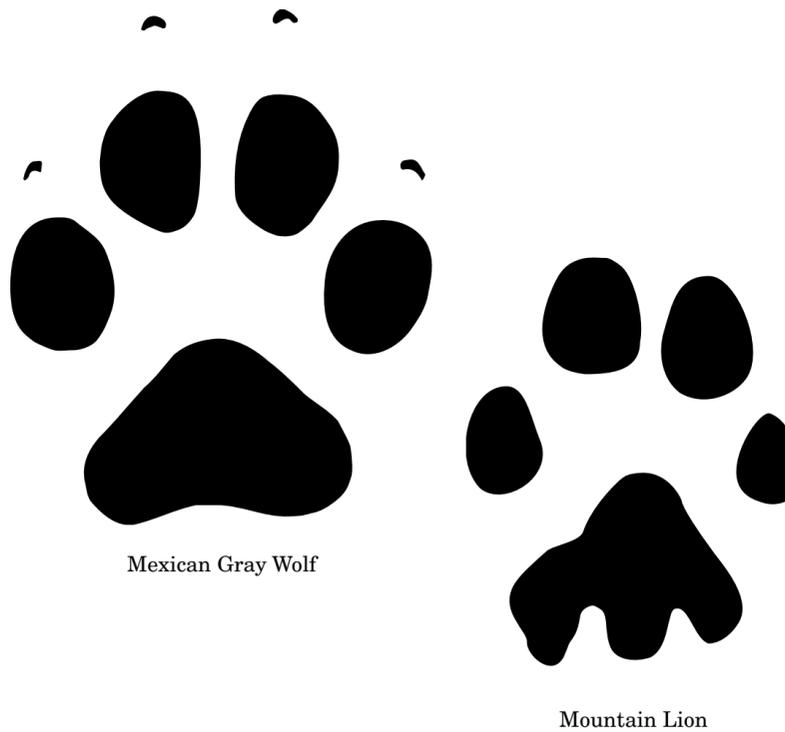
Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*)

- 55-67 inches (121 – 170 cm.) in length (including tail)
- 50-85 pounds (22.7 – 38.6 kg.)
- Predominantly gray. Ears more rounded and appear to be relatively smaller than those of a coyote. Holds tail straight when running, never curled.
- Most active at night but may be active any time.

Is that a wolf?

How do you distinguish between a mountain lion and a wolf pawprint?

Examine the (actual-size) tracks pictured here. What major, and not-so-obvious, differences can you discover? [HINT: Look at features such as the overall shape of the print, presence or absence of toenails, shape of toes, placement of toes in relationship to the pad, shape/number of “lobes” on paw pad, symmetry of pad and toes.]



Can wolves survive in Arizona in the 21st Century?

Historical perspective:

When settlers first colonized Arizona, a large contingent of military troops and miners needed food. Merriam’s elk were available in mountain country and readily provided fresh meat. By the early 1900’s, elk were extirpated from Arizona.

With its major prey base no longer available, and an extremely large cattle population moving westward, wolves turned to what was available – cattle. Of course, that put them at odds with the cattlemen. In the mid-1890’s, a devastating drought hit the state, creating significant problems for cattle growers. With little forage for their livestock, and the threat of cattle depredation by wolves, the early ranchers and federal government began their “war on wolves” in earnest.

Modern perspective:

Over 100 years later, attitudes toward wolves have changed dramatically. We no longer consider wolves to be “bloodthirsty critters that will attack anything.” In addition, habitat conditions have changed dramatically since the last time we lived with wolves in the Southwest. Elk herds have recovered and are abundant and cattle stocking rates have been reduced through modern range management practices. Many wolf advocates now are working for the return of el lobo to the wildlands of Arizona and have assisted with wolf recovery in a number of ways.

There are still those who do not like the idea of wild and free-ranging wolves. However, their concern is generally not fear of the animals, as it was during the late 1800’s and early part of the 1900’s. Rather, their concern is for their economic livelihood: cattle. Many ranchers are descendants of early cattle growers in Arizona who enjoyed access to public lands for grazing privileges. The reintroduction of wolves onto some of that land has the potential to impact the grazing privileges they have enjoyed for several generations.

How will the wolves fare?

Although it is still too early to determine the success of this reintroduction, it is important to note that most of the captive-reared wolves released have adapted well to surviving on their own. In acclimation pens, wolves are fed road-killed elk (food unsuitable for donations to human food banks) and most have been able to make their own elk kills upon release from those pens. Even after several generations in captivity, the released wolves still seem to exhibit those instinctive pack and hunting skills that are necessary for their long-term survival.

What happens if a wolf released into the wild becomes a nuisance?

All Mexican wolves are endangered and receive protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Under the “non-essential, experimental population” rule, which gives greater flexibility for management of wolves, any wolf considered to be a “problem” can be recaptured and returned to captivity if other management activities cannot prevent continuing problems. Additionally, any rancher who loses cattle to wolf depredation is reimbursed by a private endowment fund, established by the environmental organization Defenders of Wildlife, that covers the complete market value of that animal.

Are there wolves in Arizona?

Arizona wolves through history

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| Until 1900 | Mexican wolves were believed common through eastern and central Arizona, above 4000 feet in elevation. |
| Mid-1900’s | Wolves in Arizona were completely extirpated, with only a few remaining in Mexico. |
| 1976 | <i>Canis lupus baileyi</i> (Mexican wolf) was listed as endangered under the ESA (Endangered Species Act). |
| 85-85 | Seven wild-caught wolves were brought to the USA from Mexico; captive breeding program underway. |
| 1997 | Decision was made by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to move forward with Mexican wolf reintroduction program. More than 150 Mexican wolves existed in 40 captive breeding institutions located across the USA and in Mexico. The reintroduction program began with 11 wolves being placed into acclimation pens off-limits to human contact. |
| 1998 | Eleven wolves initially released from three acclimation pens into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. Overall management plan is to have 100 free-ranging wolves in recovery area (Arizona and New Mexico). |
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If I meet a wolf, what should I do?

As with any wild animal on its turf, following some simple rules in wolf country will make your experience more enjoyable and memorable.

Follow a wildlife friendly code of conduct in wolf country: remember that *you are a guest in their home!*

Drive slowly and take time to enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

Listen for wolves! If you hear them howling, remember this is an experience unknown to people for over half a century.

Keep food and garbage in a secure place. (Tents should not be considered a secure place.)

Keep all pets on a leash or under control at all times. (Like children and domestic dogs, wolves are curious by nature.)

Pay attention to signs indicating “You are now in Wolf Country!” Obey all rules and regulations.

Think like a wolf. Remember that wolves are wild animals and will respond as such.

If you see a curious wolf near your camp and do not feel comfortable, you can legally scare it away by throwing rocks in its general direction without hitting it, or by making a loud noise.

If you see a wolf in the wild, please let us know when and where. Special notes on the wolf’s behavior will also be helpful. Please report any sightings to:

Mexican wolf hotline: 1-800-459-WOLF (9653)
AZ Game and Fish Department: 520-367-4281 or (602) 789-3500
Mexican Wolf Field Office: 520-339-4329

Where can I get more information about Mexican wolves?

www.azgfd.com <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/MexicanWolf/>
www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/wolves/howl.html

The Interagency Mexican Wolf Team is a partnership of Arizona Game and Fish, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Wildlife Services, US Forest Service, and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.