**All About Wolves - C**

Wolves develop from pups at an incredible rate. Pups are born, in late April, after just a two-month pregnancy. They are born deaf, blind, and weigh no more than a can of soda pop. At this time, pups can do basically just one thing – suckle their mother’s milk.

Within a month, pups can hear and see, weigh ten pounds, and explore and play around the den site. The parents and sometimes one- or two- year old siblings bring food back to the den site. The food is regurgitated for the pups to eat. By about two months of age (late June), pups are fully weaned and eat only meat. By three months of age (late July), pups travel as much as a few miles to rendezvous sites, where pups wait for adults to return from hunts.

Pups surviving to six or seven months of age (late September) have adult teeth, are eighty percent their full size, and travel with the pack for many miles as they hunt and patrol their territory. When food is plentiful, most pups survive to their first birthday. But often, food is scarce and no pups survive. The life of a wolf is difficult and, typically, short. The chances of pup survival are highly variable. Some years, most or all pups die; other years, all survive. Of the wolves that survive their first 6-9 months, most are dead by 3-4 years of age. These rates of mortality are normal, even when humans are not involved in the death of wolves.

Pups depend on food from their parents. Relationships among older, physically mature offspring are tense. These wolves want to mate, but alphas (the dominant male and female) repress these attempts. So, mating typically requires leaving the pack, which can be dangerous. While waiting for a good opportunity to leave, these subordinate wolves want the safety and food that come from pack living. They are sometimes tolerated by the alphas depending on their degree of obedience and submission. For a subordinate wolf, the choice is usually bend to the will of the alphas or leave the pack.

From birth until death, a wolf is inextricably linked to other wolves in a complex web of social relationships. The ultimate basis for these relationships is sharing food with some, depriving it from others, reproducing with another, and suppressing reproduction among others. Most wolves live in packs, sharing daily life with three to eleven other wolves. Core pack members are an alpha pair and their pups. Other members commonly include offspring from previous years, and occasionally other less closely related wolves.

Alphas lead travels and hunts. They feed first, and they exclude from feeding whom ever they choose. Maintaining alpha status requires controlling the behavior of pack mates. Occasionally a subordinate wolf is strong enough to take over the alpha position. Of the pups that survive their first year, only about one or two of every ten rise to the level of alpha. Most die without ever reproducing, and few wolves ever live long enough to grow old.

Pack members are usually, but not always friendly and cooperative. Wolves from other packs are usually, but not always enemies. Managing all of these relationships, in a way that minimizes the risk of injury and death to one’s self, requires sophisticated communication. Accurately interpreting and judging these communications requires intelligence. Communication and intelligence are needed to know who my friends and enemies are, where they are, and what may be their intentions. These may be the reasons that most social animals, including humans, are intelligent and communicative.

Wolves are like humans for having such complex family relationships. Wolves are also like some humans in that they wage complete warfare toward their neighbors. An alpha wolf typically kills one to three wolves in his or her lifetime.

Text and Images from *Wolves and Moose of Isle Royale*

(http://www.isleroyalewolf.org/)

**All About Wolves - D**

The life of a wolf is largely occupied with walking. Wolves are tremendous walkers. Day after day, wolves commonly walk for eight hours a day, averaging five miles per hour. They commonly travel thirty miles a day, and may walk 4,000 miles a year.

Wolves in packs walk for two basic reasons - to capture food and to defend their territories. Isle Royale wolf territories average about 75 square miles - small compared to some wolf populations, where territories can be as large as 500 square miles. To patrol and defend even a small territory requires endless walking.

About once a week, wolves patrol most of their territorial boundary. About every two to three hundred yards an alpha wolf will scent mark, that is, urinate or defecate in a conspicuous location. This communicates to other wolves that this area is defended. Territorial defense is a matter of life and death. Intruding wolves, if detected, are chased off or killed if possible. Because territories are a pack’s hunting grounds, giving up territory to other wolves is giving up food for the family. Territories are large enough to contain all the prey that a pack needs. Much drama in a wolf community comes from territoriality and the behavior of aggressive and opportunistic wolves.

Isle Royale wolves capture and kill, with their teeth, moose that are ten times their size. A successful alpha wolf will do this more than one hundred times in its life. Wolves minimize the risk of severe injury and death by attacking the most vulnerable - the young, old or sick. A moose can easily swing around, lifting the wolf into the air, and hurl the wolf into a tree. Most experienced wolves have broken (and healed) their ribs on several occasions. Moose can also deliver powerful kicks with their hooves. Wolves occasionally die from attacking moose. Somehow wolves are incredible judges of what they can handle. Wolves encounter and chase down many moose. During the chase wolves test their prey. Wolves attack only about 1 out of every ten moose that they chase down. Of the moose they do attack, they kill 8 or 9 of every 10. The decision to attack or not is a vicious tension between intense hunger and wanting not to be killed by your food.

Typically, wolves consume impressive portions of their prey, eating all but the rumen contents, larger bones, and some hair. They typically consume 80 to 100% of all that is edible. These eating habits make sense: starvation is a very common cause of death for wolves, killing prey requires a tremendous amount of energy and is a life-threatening prospect for a wolf. They can't afford to waste anything with nutritional value.

When wolves are active, they are really active. On a daily basis, they burn about 70% more calories compared to typical animals of similar size. The intensity at which wolves work while hunting is far beyond the capabilities of a human. While spending all this energy, wolves may eat only once every five to ten days. During the time between kills a wolf may lose as much as 8-10% of its body weight. However, a wolf can regain all of this lost weight in just two days of eating and resting. When food is plentiful, wolves spend a substantial amount of time simply resting, because they can. When food is scarce, wolves spend much time resting because they need to. Wolves work tremendously hard, but they also take resting very seriously.

The causes of wolf death are primarily lack of food and being killed by other wolves in conflict over food. Most wolves die while in the process of trying to find a new pack to join as young adults. Leaving the home pack is tremendously risky, but a risk worth taking. Ultimately, the only thing that matters is reproducing and reproduction is very unlikely within the pack to which a wolf is born. It is better to risk death for some chance of finding a mate and a territory, than to live safely, but have virtually no chance of reproduction.

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