

The Gray Wolf

A Reading A-Z Level L Benchmark Book

Word Count: 360




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The Gray Wolf



Written by Ned Jensen

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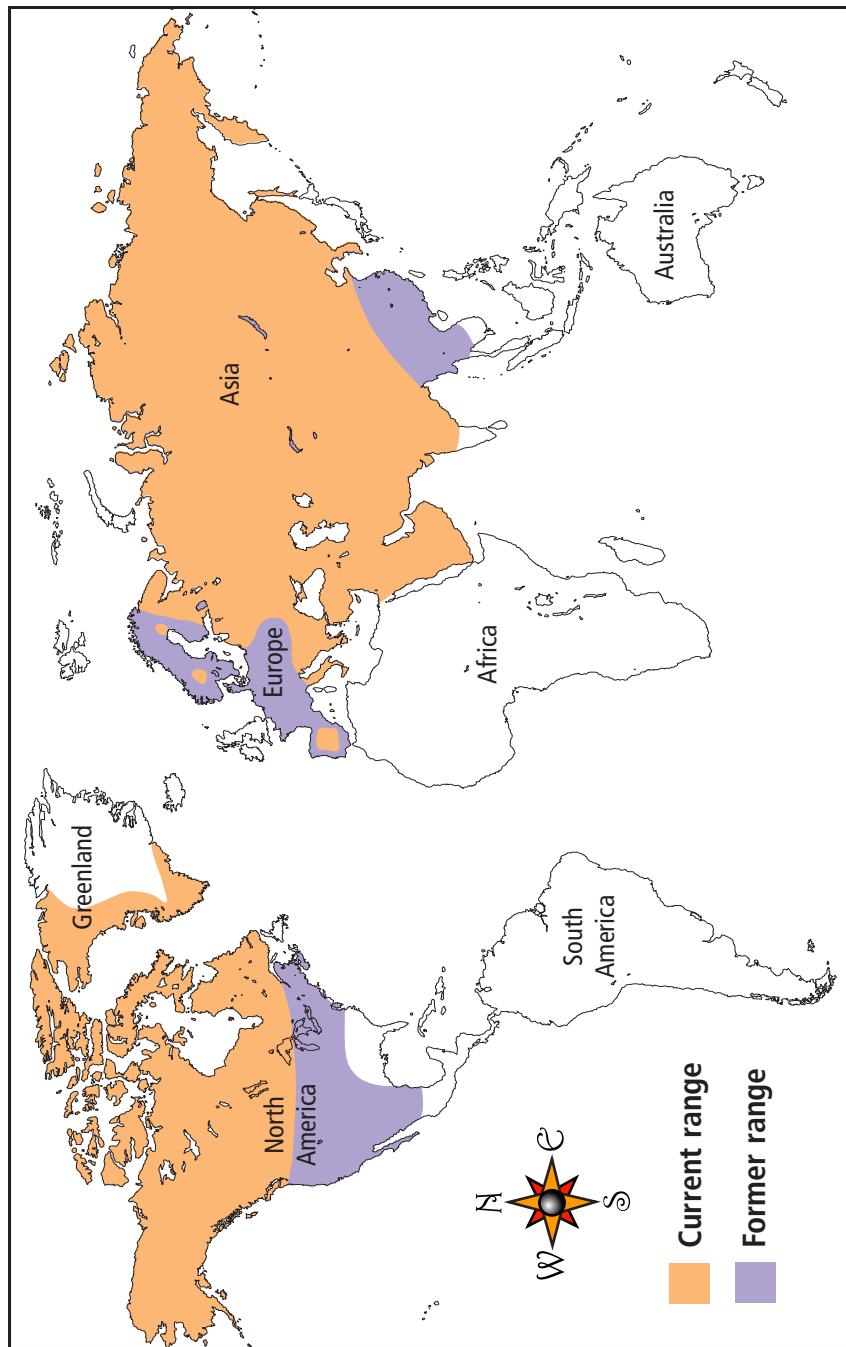
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Wolves howl for many reasons—not just the full moon.

❦ ❦ ❦ Introduction ❦ ❦ ❦

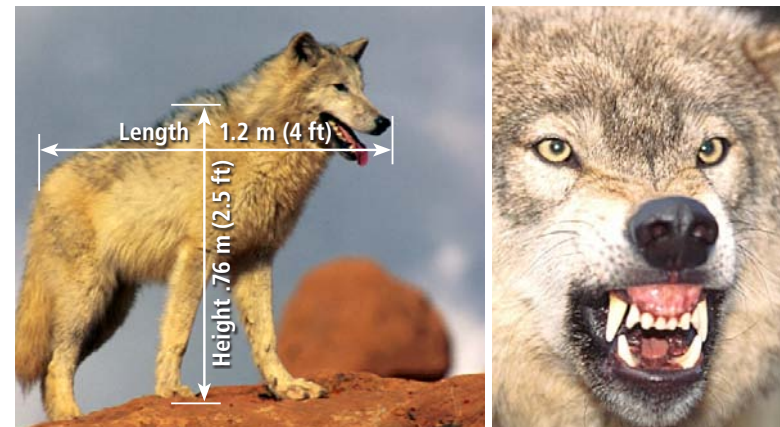
Long ago, the stillness of the night was often broken by the haunting howl of the gray wolf. But today the wolf's howl is seldom heard. Humans changed the land and drove wolves away. Ranchers shot and trapped wolves to prevent them from killing cattle and sheep. Few wolves remain where large numbers once lived.



❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ Wolf Traits ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

The gray wolf is the largest of all wolves. If measured to the shoulders, a full-grown gray wolf can be as tall as a tabletop. It can be 1.2 meters (4 ft) long from its nose to the base of its tail. A male wolf can weigh 39 kilograms (86 lbs).

Wolves have extremely powerful jaws. A wolf's bite is five times stronger than a human's and two times stronger than a large dog's.



Gray wolves are large animals with strong jaws.



Note the black wolf in the back.



Gray wolves aren't just gray. Their thick, warm fur can be tan to pure black. Wolves have wide feet to help them walk on top of snow.



A wolf pack keeps track of animals that enter its territory.

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ Wolf Packs ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Wolves live in groups called **packs**. An average pack has from 5 to 9 wolves. Wolves have been known to travel in packs of up to 30.

The pack is made up of one male leader, one female leader, and their **offspring**. The male and female leaders are called **alphas** (AL-fas). The offspring stay with the pack until they are two or three years old, when they leave to look for mates. The offspring and their mates then have pups and start new packs.

Working in packs enables wolves to hunt large animals. Wolves hunt deer, elk, moose, and other animals. They also hunt smaller animals such as rabbits.

Pack members use the position of their ears, mouths, and tails to communicate. They also use barks, whimpers, and howls. Wolves smell and lick each other, too.



This white wolf is using body position to communicate while standing over its prey.



A wolf pup at the den entrance

❧ ❧ ❧ ❧ Wolf Pups ❧ ❧ ❧

In spring, the alpha female wolf digs a long tunnel with a den at the end. In the protection of the den, she gives birth to 4 to 6 pups. The pups are born blind and deaf, and they weigh only about as much as a can of soup.



Gray wolf pups outside their den

The pups nurse for about two months. Then they enjoy warm meals of meat that their parents **regurgitate** for them.



Wolf pups spend lots of time playing with other pack members.

❖ ❖ ❖ Glossary ❖ ❖ ❖	
alphas	the male and female leaders of a wolf pack (p. 8)
offspring	the babies or children of people or other animals (p. 8)
packs	groups of wolves or wild dogs (p. 8)
regurgitate	to bring up partially digested food (p. 11)

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