

WOLVES

IN THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS

2001 was a great year for the Eastern wolves of Algonquin Park, because hunting and trapping was banned in 39 townships surrounding the park.

Scientists call the recently recognized species *Canis lycaon* (or *Canis lupus lycaon*), but it has been commonly called the Eastern wolf, Eastern Canadian wolf, Eastern grey wolf, Red wolf, and Algonquin wolf. Despite the variation in common names, scientists agree that the lycaon wolf is distinct from the more widespread grey wolf species (*Canis lupus*). The Eastern wolf is designated officially as a species at risk. Eastern wolves look quite different from gray wolves. They have brownish, salt-and-pepper coats with cinnamon coloured fur behind their ears, and are much smaller than the rest of Canadian wolves. They also have rather long legs, narrow muzzles and large ears. (see photo on right)

Algonquin Park is the largest protected habitat in this species' geographic range, which is believed to extend across central Ontario and southern Quebec. Despite the large size of the park, its population of about 175 wolves is in decline due to human killing outside park boundaries. COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) says the wolf species is threatened by interbreeding with coyotes (*Canis latrans*), and that this problem is made worse by human exploitation of wolves.



photo: Robert McCaw

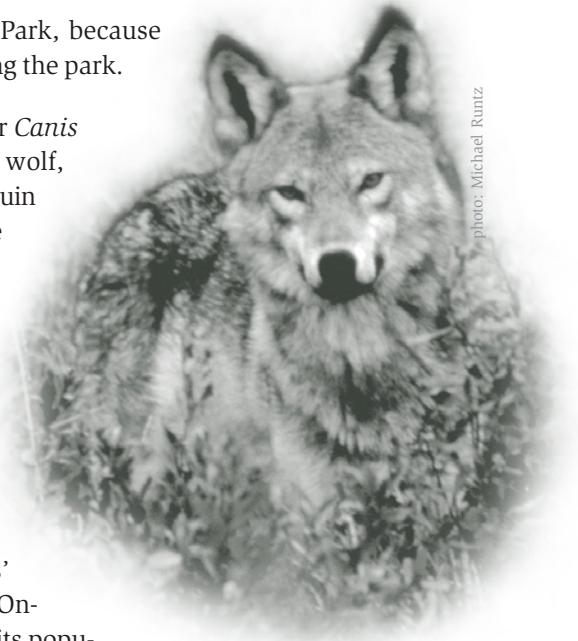


photo: Michael Runtz

Wolves are powerful, intelligent, territorial and social animals. They have complex social families and live in packs. Most wolves weigh between 60 and 100 lbs. The centre of a wolf's universe is its pack, and howling is the glue that keeps the pack together.

Wolves in the wild have an average life span of six to eight years. Wolves can run at speeds of 40-56 kilometres per hour. A wolf's sense of smell is 100 times more sensitive than a human's. Wolves are predators. Wolves feed mainly on the meat from ungulates such as deer, moose, and elk, and they also eat beavers, rabbits and small rodents.

Wolves are very shy of humans and try to avoid them. They need large wilderness areas to survive. Main threats to the survival of wolves — loss of habitat due to destruction, development and encroachment by humans.



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