

## Lesson Plan

### Wolf Awareness

**Book:** *We Need Wolves*

**Series:** The Animal Files

**Level:** Navigator

### Objective

To help students conduct and summarize research about the diet, habitat, and life cycle of various wolf species, as well as the ways each species affects the habitats in which it lives.

### Supplies

- *We Need Wolves* book
- “Wolf Awareness Week” article on the Defenders of Wildlife website:  
<https://defenders.org/wolf-awareness-week>
- Computer access for students

### Before the Activity

Read *We Need Wolves* out loud to students, or assign it to students to read on their own.

### Activity

Have students turn to page 28 and read the “Wolf Awareness Week” sidebar. During the third week of October, an organization called Defenders of Wildlife celebrates Wolf Awareness Week. During this time, they teach people about the ways wolves are important to ecosystems and what people can do to help.

Read through the “Wolf Awareness Week” page on the Defenders of Wildlife website as a class. Then divide students into small groups of three or four. Each group should choose one of the species listed on this page (Gray Wolves, Mexican Gray Wolves, or Red Wolves). They should use the links on the “Wolf Awareness Week” page to research this species, taking notes about the following topics:

- Appearance
- Diet
- Habitat
- Behavior
- Life Cycle
- Range
- Population
- Benefits

Each group should write a short essay about their wolf species. It should include one to two sentences about each of the eight topics they researched.

## Evaluation

Give each group 2 points for each summary, for up to 16 points. Sample answers are included below, though students' answers will vary somewhat.

Gray Wolf: [https://defenders.org/gray-wolf/basic-facts?\\_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144](https://defenders.org/gray-wolf/basic-facts?_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144)

- Appearance: A gray wolf has black, gray, or white fur. It looks similar to a German shepherd or malamute.
- Diet: Gray wolves mainly hunt large, hooved mammals such as elk and deer. They may also scavenge animals that have already died.
- Habitat: Gray wolves live in forests and mountains.
- Behavior: Gray wolves travel and hunt in packs of 7 to 8, with an alpha couple leading each pack. They tend to be active at dawn and dusk, and they use barks or growls to communicate.
- Life Cycle: Pups are born small and blind, so pack members care for pups for the first 10 months. Wolves can live 7 to 8 years in the wild.
- Range: Gray wolves once lived all throughout North America. Today, they live only in Canada, Alaska, the Great Lakes, the Pacific Northwest, and the Northern Rockies.
- Population: More than 7,000 gray wolves live in Alaska; 3,700 live in the Great Lakes; and 1,675 can be found in Northern Rockies.
- Benefits: Wolves help the environment by keeping prey populations (such as elk and deer) under control. Leftovers from their hunts help provide food for other scavengers.

Mexican Gray Wolf: [https://defenders.org/mexican-gray-wolf/basic-facts?\\_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144](https://defenders.org/mexican-gray-wolf/basic-facts?_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144)

- Appearance: Mexican gray wolves are gray with light brown fur on their backs. They have long legs and sleek fur.
- Diet: Mexican gray wolves mainly hunt large, hooved mammals such as elk and deer. They also eat small mammals, including javelinas.
- Habitat: Mexican gray wolves live in forests, mountains, and scrublands.
- Behavior: Mexican gray wolves live in packs, which have a strict social structure that helps the animals work together. Each pack is led by a male and female who have pups together.
- Life Cycle: Because pups are born blind and helpless, the pack works together to care for them for the first 10 months. These wolves can live as long as 15 years.
- Range: Mexican gray wolves have lost much of their original habitat throughout central Mexico and the US Southwest. They have been reintroduced in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Mexico.
- Population: About 300 Mexican gray wolves live in captivity. Only 114 live in the wild, though conservationists are hoping to help this population grow.
- Benefits: These wolves help keep prey populations (such as deer, elk, and javelinas) in balance by hunting old, sick animals. This hunting also helps prevent overgrazing, which keeps habitats healthy.

Red Wolf: [https://defenders.org/red-wolf/basic-facts?\\_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144](https://defenders.org/red-wolf/basic-facts?_ga=2.137991024.1331423044.1538142144-54716815.1538142144)

- Appearance: Red wolves have gray-black fur with a reddish tint. They are smaller and thinner than gray wolves.
- Diet: The red wolf eats deer, small mammals, and rodents. In some cases, it eats insects and berries.
- Habitat: Red wolves live in lowlands and mountains. They often build dens in hollow trees or near streams.
- Behavior: Red wolves are nocturnal. They often hunt alone or in small packs that are led by a breeding pair (the alpha male and female). Red wolves often mate for life.
- Life Cycle: Only the alpha male and female mate have pups, which their pack members care for. In the wild, red wolves live for 6 to 7 years.
- Range: Red wolves once lived in the US Southeast. They lived as far south as Florida, as far north as Pennsylvania, and as far west as Texas. Today, they live in an area in North Carolina.
- Population: Because of hunting, red wolves nearly went extinct in the 1980s, when fewer than 20 were left. Today, they are again in danger of going extinct.
- Benefits: Red wolves have historically been incorrectly perceived as pests, but like other wolves, they help control prey populations.

## **Standards**

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational texts, grade 5 (RI 5.2) and writing standards, grade 5 (W 5.1).