



# Wildlife Notes

<http://wildlife.state.nm.us/education/index.htm>

## Mexican Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*)

### Identification

The Mexican gray wolf typically weighs 50–80 pounds, stands 28–32 inches at the shoulder and measures 5-½ feet from snout to tail (approximately the size of a large German shepherd). Coat color may vary, but solid black or white does not occur.

Similar in appearance to coyotes, at a distance wolves can be difficult to differentiate. Mexican gray wolves weigh two–three times more, have larger blocky heads, more rounded ears and feet larger in proportion to the body than coyotes. As a result of reintroduction, many wolves have radio collars—coyotes do not.

### Early Encounters

Our connection to wolves is prehistoric, dating back an estimated 100,000 years, when humans domesticated the wolf—which has become the many breeds of domestic dogs known today.

As a result of these early encounters and our historic relationship, wolves have become a timeless symbol. From ancient song, fable and myth to modern literature and popular culture, the howl of the wolf still stirs our collective soul and imaginations.

### History of Reintroduction

Often referred to as 'Mexican wolf' or 'lobo,' the Mexican gray wolf is one of five subspecies found in North America.

One of the rarest and genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf in the world, the Mexican gray wolf was once found from central Mexico to New Mexico, southern Arizona and Texas.

Due to unregulated hunting, trapping and poisoning begun in the late 1800s, few Mexican gray wolves remained by 1950, and by 1970 the last Mexican gray wolf in the United States was killed.

Listed endangered in 1976 by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service—under legal pressure from environmental groups—a reintroduction program was created in 1991.

Beginning with the last seven of this subspecies found in northern Mexico, a captive population was begun. By 1998, eleven Mexican gray wolves in three separate groups were reintroduced into the Apache National Forest in Arizona. Nine more wolves in two groups were reintroduced into the Gila National Forest north of Silver City in 2000, and by spring that year the first known wild Mexican gray wolf in over 70 years was born in New Mexico.

These released populations are designated 'experimental' and allowed to disperse and range throughout these national forests. The 'experimental' designation allows researchers to capture and relocate animals involved in livestock predation or travel beyond the recovery areas. This designation also enables citizens to deter attacks on livestock by this endangered species.

The USFWS' goal of 100 self-sustaining Mexican gray wolves has yet to be achieved. Due to illegal poaching, the current outlook for the Mexican gray wolf remains guarded with a population of 58 wolves reported as of May, 2012.



## Biology

The Mexican gray wolf is highly social, living in packs that average four to five members in size. Led by a dominant pair, most often only the dominant female will mate—sometimes with a nondominant male. Breeding occurs from late winter to early spring. After a gestation period of 63 days, the female gives birth to a single litters of between 1–6 pups.

All members of the pack share the care and feeding of pups. Adults will travel considerable distances to forage and transport food in their stomachs, regurgitating it for the pups back at the den. Pups mature at approximately two years of age and become adult pack members.

Mexican gray wolves are carnivores and generalists—eating rabbits, squirrels and mice, but preferring larger ungulates (hoofed mammals), such as elk, deer and antelope. Though livestock predation sometimes occurs, it is more often only when conditions in the wild are strained and food sources are inadequate to support a pack.

## Captive Populations

The captive Mexican gray wolf population begun in 1991 continues at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, however, to foster wild behavior this breeding and holding facility is closed to the public.

## Where to See the Mexican Gray Wolf

- Rio Grande Zoological Park, Albuquerque, NM
- Alameda Park, Alamogordo, NM
- Living Desert State Park, Carlsbad, NM
- El Paso Zoo, TX

## Wolves Are Protected

Wolves are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act and by the New Mexico Wildlife Conservation Act. Federal penalties for shooting a wolf can include a year in jail and a \$50,000 fine with additional New Mexico state penalties for violating the Wildlife Conservation Act.

Rewards totaling \$45,000 for information leading to arrest and prosecution of wolf poachers are offered jointly by federal and state agencies and conservation organizations.

## It is illegal to:

- Kill or injure a wolf because it is near you or your property.
- Kill or injure a wolf if it attacks your pet.
- Kill or injure a wolf feeding on dead livestock.
- Enter posted closures around release pens, active dens and rendezvous sites.
- Shoot a wolf because of mistakenly identifying it as a coyote or anything else.

## However, it is legal to kill, injure or harass a wolf if:

- The wolf is in the act of killing, wounding or biting cattle, sheep, horses, mules or burros owned by you and which are on private or tribal land.
- Acting in defense of human life.

## Reporting Required

Any person taking such action must report the incident within 24 hours to the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Office: **1-888-459-9653** or the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish 24-hour dispatch telephone: **1-800-432-4263**.

For more information about Mexican wolves and the USFWS Wolf Recovery Program, visit: [www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/).



## New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

Hunters, Anglers and Trappers Pay for Conservation

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Mexican gray wolf



Coyote



Photo by Dan Williams.

