



**MEXICAN
GRAY WOLF**
CARNIVORA
Family: Canidae
Genus: *Canis*
**Species: *lupus*
*baileyi***



Range: once ranged widely from central Mexico throughout the southwestern U.S. Now, range is restricted to southeastern Arizona and parts of New Mexico and northern Mexico

Habitat: prefer mountain forests, grasslands and scrublands

Niche: carnivore, crepuscular, terrestrial

Wild diet: elk, white-tailed deer, and mule deer, javelinas, rabbits, ground squirrels and mice including fur and bones. Also scavenge on carcasses of prey species.

Zoo diet:

Life Span: wild up to 10 years, captivity up to 15 years

Sexual dimorphism: Males are typically heavier and taller than the females.

Location in SF Zoo: Bear Grottos

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The Mexican Gray wolf, commonly referred to as "El lobo" or "lobo," is the smallest subspecies of gray wolf; it is the most southerly gray wolf and is the most genetically distinct; this subspecies is distinguished by its smaller, narrower skull and its darker pelt, which is gray with light brown on its back. Fur is thick and the long bushy tail is often black-tipped.

Wolves are carnivores with long muzzles with powerful jaws and sharp teeth, including long canines and carnassials, for tearing flesh. In the Canidae Family, large molars have been retained and are useful for their more opportunistic feeding habits.

Dental Formula: **I** 3/3, **C** 1/1, **P** 4/4, **M** 2/3, Total = 42.

They have large eyes for very good eyesight, long ears for acute hearing, and a keen sense of smell. Wolves have long legs and a sleek body for running fast and for long-distance endurance. The claws of the toes are non retractable and are visible in their footprint. Feet have well-developed pads with small bumps which help cushion their steps and prevent slipping.

Weight: 60 - 80 lbs
Length: 5.5 ft inc. tail
SH: 28 - 32 in
TL: 14 - 20 in

STATUS & CONSERVATION

The Mexican gray wolf is critically endangered and in 1976, the Mexican gray wolf was declared an endangered species. Though they once numbered in the thousands, these wolves were hunted, trapped, and poisoned to near extinction in the U.S. by the mid-1970s. The 5 remaining in the wild (four males and one pregnant female) were rescued and were used to start a captive breeding program. In 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was able to release 11 Mexican gray wolves back into the wild in Arizona. Although their numbers have grown slowly, and they remain the most endangered subspecies of wolf in the world; at the end of 2014 at least 110 wolves occupied the Mexican Wolf Recovery Area (MWRA).

COMMUNICATION & OTHER BEHAVIOR

The Gray Wolf lives in packs of extended family groups of usually 4-8 individuals, including an alpha male and female. The size of the pack is determined by the availability of resources and the size of their territory. The pack has a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate individuals to help it work as a unit. The dominant male/female control when and where the pack will hunt. Mexican gray wolves hunt cooperatively to bring down prey animals usually much larger than themselves. They swallow food in large chunks, barely chewing it. This is accomplished primarily by chasing their prey often over large distances.

Mexican wolves have an intricate communication system that includes scent marking, body postures, and numerous vocalizations such as howling, barking, whining, and growling. Wolves howl as a signal to other wolves, telling of the beginning and ending of a hunt, of a wolf separated from its pack, as a warning to other wolf packs, and simply for the fun of it. This howl can be heard over six miles. Pack territories can be several hundred square miles.

COURTSHIP & YOUNG

The alpha pair is usually monogamous, and they typically are the only breeding animals in the pack. Generally, they breed in February and give birth in April or early May. The litter is born in a burrowed-out den. These dens may be used year after year. Pups are born blind and defenseless. The breeding, or "alpha," pair are assisted in raising their pups by the entire pack until they reach physical maturity at about 10 months of age. When returning from the hunt, pack members regurgitate some of their food for the hungry pups.

Gestation: 63 days

Sexual Maturity: 2 - 3 years

of Mammas: 5 pairs

Weaning Age: 6 weeks

of Young: 4 – 6 pups

Weight at birth: 1 lb

MISCELLANEOUS

The gray wolf, *Canus lupus*, is also known as the Timber Wolf. *C. lupus* has 40 subspecies including the dingo, domestic dog and other wolf subspecies such as the Mexican gray wolf throughout the northern hemisphere.

The Mexican gray wolf was once "top dog" in the southwest. Biologists believe that lobos will restore balance to the Southwest's ecosystems by keeping deer, elk and javelin by keeping populations healthy and in check. Wolves strengthen these animals by preying on the old, sick and young, and prevent their populations from growing so numerous that they overgraze and destroy habitat that countless other species depend on.

Sources:

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Walker's Mammals of the World Vol I © 1999 by Ronald M. Nowalk, The Johns Hopkins University Press, p 664-669

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