



WOLVERINE
CARNIVORA
Family: Mustelidae
Genus: *Gulo*
Species: *gulo*



Range: N Canada, Alaska, Nordic Europe, W. Russia and Siberia

Habitat: boreal forest and subarctic and alpine tundra

Niche: omnivorous, terrestrial, mostly nocturnal

Wild diet: small mammals such as rabbits & rodents, weakened caribou, deer, and carrion, eggs, birds, roots, seeds, insect larvae, and berries.

Zoo diet:

Life Span: 10 – 12 years; captivity 17 years

Sexual dimorphism: Females average 30% less in weight and 10% less in length than males.

Location in SF Zoo: East side of Pachyderm building

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Wolverines are stocky and muscular with broad and rounded head, small eyes and short rounded ears. They have a keen sense of smell but poor eyesight. They have reputations for ferocity and strength out of proportion to their size, with the ability to kill prey many times larger than itself. They may defend kills against larger or more numerous predators such as wolves or bears.

Wolverines do not hibernate but are well adapted for winter existence. They have long, dense oily fur; the fur is hydrophobic and resistant to frost. Wolverine's sharp claws enable them to climb steep cliffs and snow-covered peaks or bring down prey and defend their territory. Like other mustelids, they possess a special upper molar in the back of the mouth that is rotated 90 degrees, towards the inside of the mouth. This adaptation allows wolverines to tear off frozen meat from prey or carrion. They are also capable of eating bones with their powerful jaws. Dental Formula: **I** 3/3, **C** 1/1, **P** 4/4, **M** 1/2, Total = 38.

Weight: 24 – 40 lbs Large males up to 71 lbs
Length: 26 – 34 in
SH: 12 – 18 in
TL: 6.7 – 10.2 in

Wolverines have unique coloration patterns on their face, neck, and chest that can allow researchers to identify individual animals based on photos showing the patterns. Their short legs, plantigrade gait and large, five-toed paws facilitate movement through deep snow.

Wolverines have anal scent glands, which produce musk and are used for marking their territory and sexual signaling. This pungent odor gave rise to the nickname "skunk bear".

STATUS & CONSERVATION

The wolverine is considered to be a near threatened species. Wolverines require large territories bringing them into conflict with human development, and hunting and trapping further reduce their numbers, causing them to disappear from large parts of their former range. Wolverine's thick fur was used to line the parkas of hunters and trappers; this practice is far less common today and the animals are protected in many areas.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Males share their territories with several females and are believed to be polygamous. Females do not overlap in their territories with other females. Successful males will form lifetime relationships with two or three females and strong family bonds. A male wolverine will interact with his kits even after they have struck out on their own. They are solitary except during the breeding season and need a lot of room to roam. Individual wolverines may travel 15 miles (24 kilometers) in a day in search of food. They are opportunistic feeders, highly effective scavengers and eat a variety of foods depending on availability.

They are good climbers and often rest in trees, where the wolverines wait until the right moment to pounce on their prey from the trees or large rocks. They are good swimmers as well.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Females give birth in alternate years. The female will initiate copulation and it is believed that ovulation is induced by copulation. Females have delayed implantation with mating occurring in the summer and implantation in early winter. Females den in the snow or under similar cover giving birth in late winter or early spring. Kits are born white and sometimes live with their mother until they reach about two years old. They are altricial. Fathers make visits to their offspring until they are weaned. Once the young are about six months old, some reconnect with their fathers and travel together for a time.

Gestation: 30 to 50 days, delayed implantation, monoestrous	Sexual Maturity: 2 yr
# of Mammae: 4 pairs (2 abdominal, 2 inguinal)	Weaning Age: 10 weeks
# of Young: 1 – 5; 1 – 2 in N America (2-3 ave)	Weight at birth: 85 g

MISCELLANEOUS

The wolverine is the largest terrestrial species of the Mustelidae (weasel) family; only the marine-dwelling sea otter and giant otter of the Amazon basin are larger.

Sources:

Walker's Mammals of the World Vol I © 1999 by Ronald M. Nowalk, The Johns Hopkins University Press, p 726-727
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