

If You Were A Wolf In The Wild

by Despina Rosales

They have blazing eyes a blood-curdling howl, and 42 sharp teeth. But they rarely attack people. What are they? Wolves!

Wolves have lived on Earth for millions of years. some kinds of wolves are extinct, but four types still share this planet with us: the grey wolf, the red wolf, the Ethiopian wolf and the maned wolf.

What would it be like to grow up as a wolf?

If you were born, say a grey wolf in the wild, you would be in springtime, weighing as much as a packet of pasta. Your mother's milk would be your only food for a few weeks. Then you could start eating meat. You'd live in a group of about 7 to 30 wolves, called a pack. It would include your mum, dad, brothers and sisters and maybe some aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents.

Where would you live? If you were a wolf in the wild, you'd live in a den. A den is a small space, probably not much bigger than the boot of a family car. It could be in a cave or a hollow log or it might be underground. You wouldn't have your own bedroom; you would have to share with everyone!

This crowded living situation helps to keep a pack safe. Small spaces are much easier to defend than big spaces. And it's everyone's job to guard the den against intruders.

Who would tell you what to do? If you were a wolf in the wild, you would have to listen to the leader (usually male) of your pack, who is called the *alpha wolf*. If you tried arguing with him, he would make himself as big as possible by holding his head high, raising his hackles and lifting his tail. He might growl at you or snarl. He might even bare his teeth, just to make sure you got the message: "Don't mess with me, buddy, I'm the leader here."

When you realised that you'd made a mistake, you'd try to apologise. You'd make yourself as small as possible by pulling back your ears, crouching down and putting your tail between your legs. And if that didn't work, you'd roll over onto your back to say, "I give up!"

If you were a wolf in the wild, you would never need to wear clothes, because the fur all over your body (called a coat) would cover you up. In winter that thick, fluffy coat would keep you toasty warm. But during warm weather, you would shd lots of hair to try to cool down.

If you were a wolf in the wild, you'd have a special way of talking. If you spoke like a wolf at school this week, you'd whimper whenever you fell over in the playground. When you heard the lunch bell. you'd yip with excitement. You would whine if you were worried about a big test and howl to greet your teacher when you walked into the classroom. If someone got too close to your desk, you'd bark. If the person didn't move, you'd snap, snarl and bare

your teeth. And if you felt like having some fun, you would put your chest on the ground, your bottom in the air and wag your tail.

What about food? If you were a wolf in the wild, you'd have to go hunting for it. Your eyes might help you to detect another animal's movement in the dark. But your incredible nose and ears would be your best helpers. Your nose would be much more powerful than it is now, and you'd be able to smell things that are more than 3 kilometres away. As for your ears, they would be able to hear what's happening up to 14 kilometres away in open country. Just imagine: that's like being able to hear across 140 football fields placed end to end.

Once you saw or heard or smelled your dinner, you'd need to catch it. If you were a wolf in the wild, your evening meal might be a big animal such as a deer, a moose or an elk, or else something smaller like a rabbit, a beaver or a bird. Whatever the prey (that's what dinner is called while it's still alive and being hunted), you and the pack would start off the hunt by carefully sneaking up on it. When the animal realised what was going on, it would frantically try to escape. Then you and the pack would chase it, running at top speed. You might run up to 60 kilometres an hour (that's 10 kilometres faster than cars are allowed to go on most suburban streets) and keep going for hours and hours without stopping. You might cover nearly 100 kilometres (1000 football fields end to end!) in a single dinner chase.

When your pack got close enough to the prey, you would all start biting the animal's back legs to slow it down and weaken it. Then one wolf would rush forward to grab the animal, pinning it down, while you and the others tore at its throat, killing it. Dinner at last!

Your razor sharp would rip through raw flesh and your powerful jaws would crunch straight through bone.

Sometimes you and a friend might decide to creep up on another wolf in your pack. You'd leap out of hiding and tackle it in a surprise attack. Then you'd wrestle, brawl and bite each other. You might even give a shoulder block or pretend to hunt each other, just for a game. What if you were to do that with your friends now? Hmm - they might not be too impressed!

After a day of hunting, running and playing - and possibly a little bit of jumping, growling, rolling, snarling, chewing, barking, howling, attacking, yelping, digging, whining, sniffing, whimpering, crouching, dancing and tail-wagging - you would be pretty tired.

So, if you were a wolf in the wild, you would go into the den with your pack and huddle together for warmth. Each of you would curl up a little ball. Your fluffy tail would cover your face while you slept (not because you wanted to hide, but because it kept your nose warm). And there, snuggled up with your wolf family, you would go to sleep and have sweet wolfy dreams.