

# Wild Kids



## Communicating with the Moon?

by Terri Ellman, International Wolf Center Intern

A hhhwooooo! What is that noise? Where is it coming from? Why is it happening? It is a howl, probably coming from a wolf, and that wolf is most likely trying to communicate with other wolves. Humans communicate in many different ways, such as through sounds, gestures and facial expressions. Just like humans, wolves communicate in more than one way.

Scientists have determined that wolves communicate in at least three ways: vocalizations, body language and their sense of smell.

Vocalizations are how wolves communicate using sounds. They may howl, bark, growl or whimper. Howling is the vocalization that humans hear the most. Wolves howl to communicate across long distances. For instance, a lone wolf may howl

to try to find another lone wolf to start a pack with. If a local pack hears the howl though, they might howl back to tell this intruder to stay out of their territory.

Wolves howl not only to tell intruders to leave but also to communicate to the rest of the pack where they are and that they should gather together. They may be meeting to go on a hunt. This is usually in the evening because that is when wolves' prey (e.g., deer, moose and beaver) are most active. Because wolves are active at night and may howl when they catch their dinner, some people believe that wolves howl at the moon. Scientists have determined that is not true. Wolves are probably just more active at the same time the moon is out.

Whimpering is another form of vocalization. Wolves may whimper to say "hello." The lowest-ranking wolf may also whimper when it is submitting to the alpha, the highest-ranking wolf.

Barking and growling are two other ways that wolves communicate vocally. Wolves may bark or growl to express anger. If an intruder comes into a pack's territory, the adult male may give several low barks to tell the unwelcome wolf to go away. If the intruder continues to make its way in, the wolf may also growl at the visitor.

## WOLF WORK

**PERSON:** Bill Paul

**JOB TITLE AND DESCRIPTION:**

Assistant State Director/Supervisory Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). He has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA on various wolf research and control projects in Minnesota for 27 years.

**TRAINING REQUIRED:**

Bachelor's degree in some wildlife-related area.

**SKILLS NEEDED TO DO THE JOB:**

General knowledge of wildlife and ability to work outdoors with a diverse group of people including other wildlife officials and the general public.



Mary Ortiz, International Wolf Center

Bill Paul is the Assistant State Director/Supervisory Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**ADVICE TO KIDS:** To pursue a career in the outdoors, go to college and get a bachelor's degree. Also, volunteer for various wildlife programs to gain experience working outdoors with people and animals.



### Activity:

Draw a line from the picture of the way humans communicate to the picture of the wolf communication that is most similar. After you finish, discuss with your parents or friends other ways that wolves and humans communicate similarly or differently.

Body language is another type of communication scientists have observed wolves using. A wolf uses body language when showing its rank. During a fight for rank position, the dominant wolf assumes a very tall posture with its tail and ears straight up. It looks like a domesticated dog that is defending its yard. The subordinate looks more like a dog that is being scolded by its owner. It has its tail between its legs, its ears down and its head lowered.

The final way that wolves communicate is by using their sense of smell. Each wolf has its own individual scent. Wolves are able to tell the difference between each wolf by that scent. Therefore, when a wolf urinates, another wolf will be able to tell if the urine came from one of the wolves in its pack or from an outsider. Wolves urinate around their territory to make sure that other wolves know that this land is already taken. It works like a “no trespassing” sign.

Humans can't urinate to make “no trespassing” signs because our sense of smell is not as good. Scientists think a wolf's sense of smell is perhaps a hundred times better than a human's is. Can you think of other ways that wolf and human communication methods are different? Can you think of any ways they are similar? Complete the activity, and see what you find. ■



Lori Schmidt, International Wolf Center



Lynn and Donna Rogers, www.bearstudy.org



Sherry Jokinen

