

## The Arctic Wolf

The Arctic wolf (*Canis lupus arctos*) is a subspecies of the Grey wolf and has many names such as the polar or white wolf and inhabits the Canadian Arctic, parts of Alaska and northern part of Greenland. It is the only subspecies of the Grey wolf that still can be found over the whole of its original range, largely because in their natural habitat they rarely encounter humans. This does not mean that their population is stable as global warming is changing their habitat, and only time will tell the affect this will have on the Arctic wolf.



Their habitat is extremely harsh and remote, and few scientists venture into their world during the long and dark winters, so details of their lives through much of the year are virtually unknown. Arctic wolves inhabit some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. During the winter temperatures can plummet to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the ground is permanently frozen. They are able to tolerate months of sub-zero temperatures and darkness each year and when necessary they can survive weeks without

food.

Like all wolves, Arctic wolves live in small family groups: a breeding pair (alpha male and female) and their pups. The pack works together to feed and care for their pups and they prey mainly on caribou and muskoxen, but also arctic hares, seals, ptarmigan and lemmings, and smaller animals such as waterfowl. To eat rodents they must pick up their scent and find the entrance to their tiny dens to flush them out. Due to the scarcity of prey they roam large areas of up to  $2,600\text{ km}^2$  (1,000 square miles) and will follow migrating caribou south during the winter, for a food source. They are not fast runners, instead relying on stamina to take down prey.



Year round white coats, slightly shorter noses and ears distinguish these wolves from other races of the grey wolf .Their lives are basically the same as wolves everywhere. Adult wolves have 42 teeth and is their main weapon in hunting. They swallow food in large chunks,

barely chewing it. They eat all of their prey, including the bones. Wolves can eat up to 20 pounds (9 kg) of meat at one meal. When they return from the hunt, wolves regurgitate some of the food for the hungry cubs. Due to the Arctic's permafrost soil and the difficulty it poses for digging dens, Arctic wolves often use rock outcroppings, caves or even shallow depressions as dens instead. The shoulder height of the arctic wolf varies from 25 to 31 inches. On average, they are about 3 feet tall from head to toe. Their body length varies from 3 to 6 feet (nose to tail). The approximate weight of a full grown male is 175 pounds. In captivity an arctic wolf can live to be over 17 years compared to the average lifespan in the wild of approximately 7 years.

The UK Wolf Conservation Trust is home to the only Arctic wolves in Britain, Sikko, Massak and Pukak (2 males and 1 female) who were born in 2011 in Parc Safari, Canada and flew to the UK at just 10 weeks old.

