

Canid Identification: Wolves, Coyotes and Dogs

Adapted from Wisconsin DNR



wolf and coyote photos ©David C. Olson

It can be difficult - especially at a distance - to tell the difference between a wolf and a coyote. In general, wolves are larger and bulkier while coyotes are shorter, sleek and lighter on their feet. Whether hunting, wildlife watching, or tracking, here are some helpful tips to distinguish between a wolf and a coyote.

Certain characteristics may vary with animal's age and health status, such as canine wear and fur conditions. If an animal has at least 8 out of 10 of these characteristics, there is a high likeliness that it is at least part or mostly wolf, but in some cases DNA testing may be needed to confirm its status.

- Head is relatively large, with broad cheeks ~ 5.75 inches (~15 cm) across, below the eyes.
- Face markings are well blended, lacking distinguishable borders.
- Well furred erect ears rounded at tip ~ 4.75 inches (~12.1 cm.) long.
- Light colored slanted eyes, ranging from amber to yellow.
- Normal coloration is rusty brown (cinnamon) with black tipped guard hair, winter coat has thick under fur and guard hair.
- Elongated snout (non-dished) with black nose and large ~ 1.0 inch (~23 mm) inward curved canine teeth.
- Narrow keeled chest and hips, front feet slightly toed out, shoulder height ~ 28 inches (~73 cm).
- Long legs with large ~ 3.5 inches (9.0 cm) long by ~ 2.6 inches (6.7 cm) wide front feet and smaller back feet.
- Ruff of fur around neck and shoulder area resembling four layer cape appearance. Chest girth ~ 24 inches (~ 60.5 cm).
- Straight busy tail with black tip, black spot (precaudal gland) on top of tails base. Tail bone length ~ 17.5 inches (43.5 cm).



- Size: Wolves are generally bigger than coyotes. Be sure to look for other identifying characteristics. Length (nose to tail): Wolf 5-6 feet, coyote, 3.5-4.5 feet.
- Weight: Wolf, 50-110 pounds; coyote, 25-45 pounds.



- Size: Wolves are generally bigger than coyotes. Be sure to look for other identifying characteristics. Height (at shoulder): Wolf 27-33 inches; coyote, 20-22 inches.
- Weight: Wolf, 50-100 pounds; coyote, 25-45 pounds.



- Head: The snouts are distinguishing features. While the wolf's snout is blocky, the coyote's snout is pointed.
- Ears: Looking at the ears is a key way to distinguish between a wolf and a coyote. Coyote ears are larger in proportion to head size. A 30 lb. coyote can have ears as big or bigger than an 80 lb. wolf. Also, wolves have rounded ears. Coyote's ears are pointed.



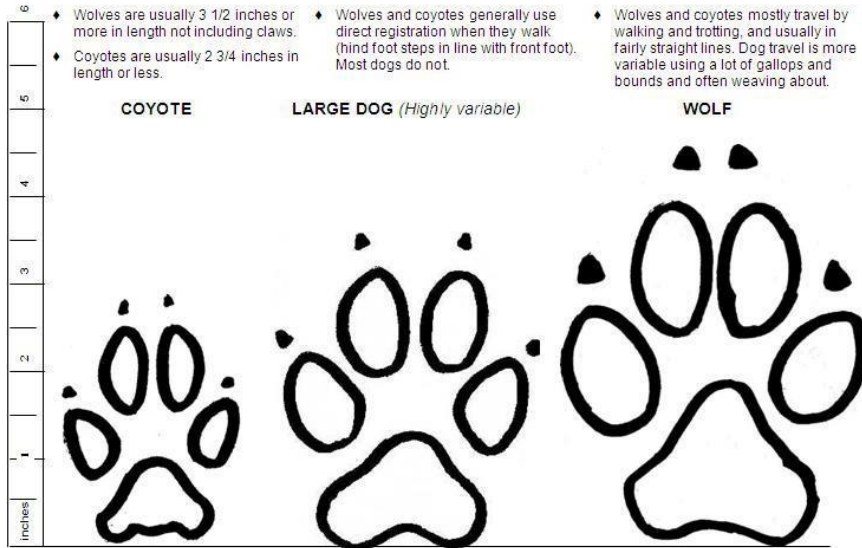
Wolf Scat



Dog Scat

- Scat: In wolves scat is distinct, cylindrical with tapered fringes of hair. Most are full of deer, beaver, or sometimes snowshoe hare hair. Usually over 1" in diameter. May be as wide as 1.5" and 4-7" long. Coyote is usually less than 1" diameter, and often full of small mammal hair. Domestic dog has a lack of hair, lack of tapered fringe and full of cereal matter.

CANID TRACK IDENTIFICATION **FRONT FEET ACTUAL SIZE**



Wolf track in fresh snow

- Tracks: Canine tracks can vary in size and shape depending on the ground softness, substrate, and size of the animal. Wolf tracks often appear a bit longer (narrow) in their overall shape, while dog tracks often appear a bit more round in shape.