

Wolves

In the last few years, **gray wolf** (*Canis lupus*) sightings in the Canadian Rockies—and opportunities to photograph them—have been steadily increasing. Several local photographers have spent considerable time working with these animals, and the fine books they have published are a testament to the rich photo possibilities.

Historically, wolves were not always a welcome sight in the national parks of the Canadian Rockies. In the 1930s, and then again in the 1950s, wolves were nearly wiped out from the mountains. Between 1952 and 1956, more than 5,000 wolves were trapped, shot or poisoned in

Alberta. Afterwards, wolves were absent from Banff National Park until the mid-1980s. In recent years, wolf sightings have become a fairly regular occurrence throughout the region.

Winter is the best season to search for wolves, especially from November to March when the animals are in the valley bottoms hunting wintering ungulates such as mule deer, elk and moose. At this time of the year, wolves hunt day or night, their pelts are in prime condition, and they look their best for photographs. As spring approaches, packs move to denning areas, they travel less, are more secretive, and hunt



grey wolf in Jasper



gray wolf

mainly at night, all of which lessens the photo opportunities.

Wolves are social carnivores that live in packs consisting of a dominant male and female, subordinate adults, juveniles, and cubs of the year. Pack size in the mountains can vary from 4 to 5 animals up to a dozen. The largest pack recorded in Banff National Park had 14 members in it. Packs actively patrol and defend a hunting territory. When prey, such as elk and moose, decline, the pack may abandon their territory and move to a new area where the hunting is better. As a result, predicting where wolves can be seen and photographed in the mountain

parks varies from year to year. For example, a few years ago, the **Maligne Lake Road** in Jasper National Park was a photo hotspot for an unwary pack of wolves that primarily hunted moose. After several seasons when the moose population declined the wolves left the area.

Banff National Park: The **Bow Valley Parkway** is one of the most reliable locations in the Canadian Rockies for photographing wolves, with roadside sightings made year-round on the southeastern half of the route between Hillsdale Meadows and Johnston Canyon. Please respect all signage along this route as it relates to closures and speed limits.

Kootenay National Park: The section of **Highway 93** between Vermilion River Crossing and Hector Gorge Viewpoint has had frequent wolf sightings in recent years.

Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre: Looking for a guaranteed wolf shot? Then head to this rehabilitation centre located near Golden, on the west side of Yoho National Park, which offers 90-minute photography sessions with resident wolves in a natural setting. For information, visit www.northernlightswildlife.com.