



Canine Communication

Humans communicate in lots of different languages, both spoken and written, in order to exchange information and express feelings. We can use words to communicate with people—and even with some animals—but animals have other ways of communicating with each other. By studying wolves for many years, we have learned a lot about how they communicate with members of their own species. Wolves can use *vocalizations*, or sounds, to communicate feelings or situations, but they also position their body parts in ways that provide information to other wolves. This is called postural communication.

Vocalization

In a way, wolves have their own language. They use specific vocalizations in different situations to communicate with other wolves, and with other species, like humans—for example, when they bark at humans approaching their den of pups.

Lone Howl

This “language” is made of sounds rather than words—mostly howling and growling.

Three common types of howls are **chorus** howls, **lone** howls and **bark** howls.

Chorus howls take place when multiple wolves in a pack howl together. This

Chorus Howl

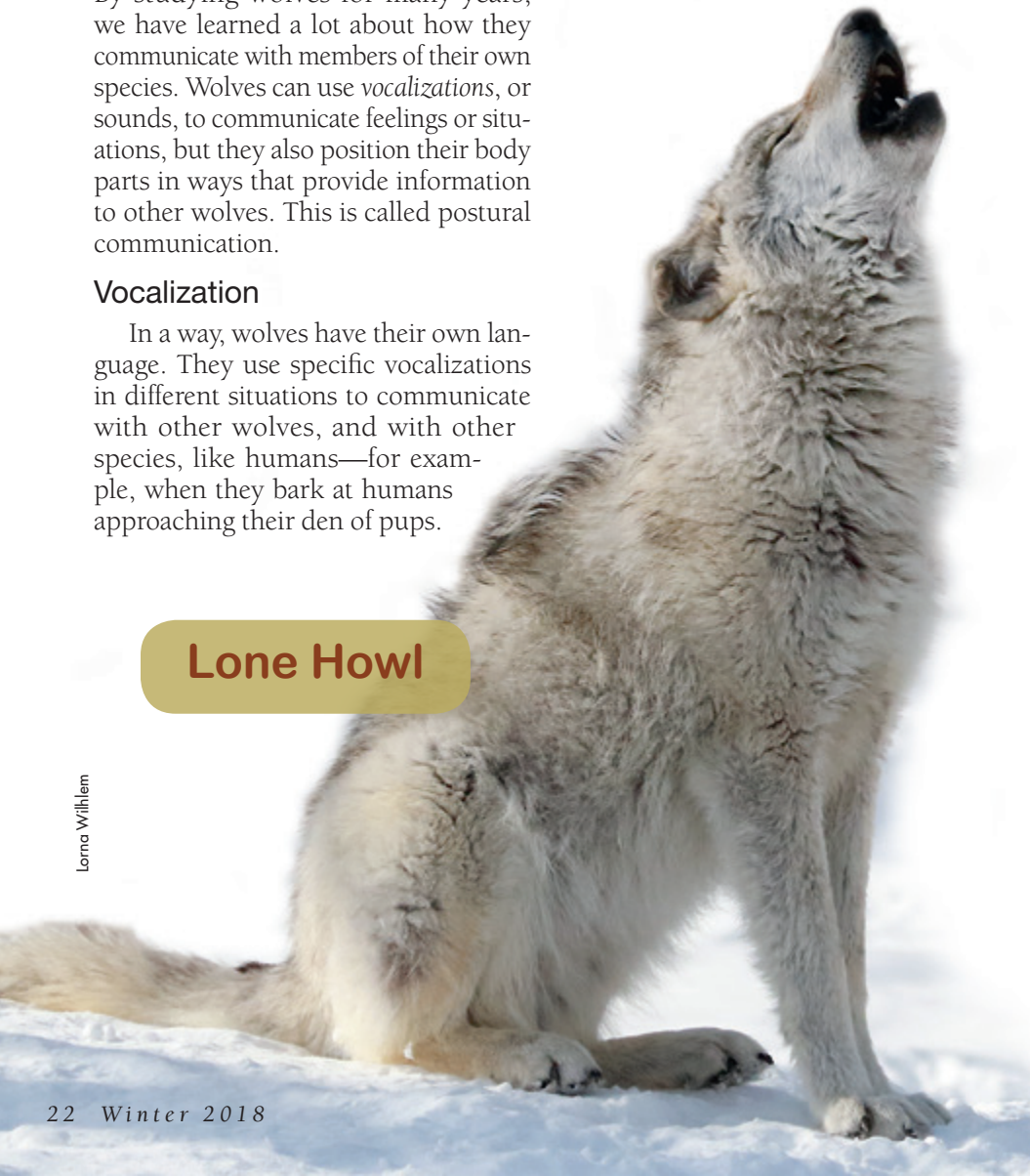
kind of howling is used for socializing with other wolves (it’s like a party!) and also for locating distant pack members. Wolves also use chorus howls to ask for the location of a pack member that has been successful getting food for the pack to eat.

Another purpose for chorus howling is that it can *deter*, or keep away, other wolf packs from the territory. The wolves in a pack can change their pitches while chorus howling. It can make their pack seem larger and convince neighboring packs that there are too many wolves to compete with for more territory. (It’s like a warning). And sometimes, it seems to be just for fun. The wolves at the International Wolf Center sometimes howl at sirens—and at other times, for no reason their keepers can detect.

Next, **lone** howls refer to a single wolf howling alone. They are used to find other wolves or packs in the area for several reasons—for instance, finding a mate or locating the pack if a wolf becomes separated.

Finally, **bark** howls are described as alternating between howls and barks, and they are typically used when a wolf is feeling threatened. The bark howl is a type of “final warning” to whatever is threatening the wolf. Wolves can use growling for a similar purpose—either to threaten, or to give a warning to whatever threatens them. Growling can be used to tell another wolf not to do something. Growling and other vocal cues are used during dominance-play behavior or when a wolf is claiming food.

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Lip Curl, Ears

Other canines make sounds similar to the ones wolves make. They also use other noises that are specific to their species. For instance, coyotes howl, too, but their howling tends to be less social. It is used to communicate with mates or other coyotes, and possibly to prevent other canines from entering their territory. The coyote howl is typically higher pitched than that of wolves, and usually contains a series of yips between long howls.

Red foxes can make other noises—one example being their scream, which helps them find a mate during the mating season. Gray foxes have a raspy bark that they use to warn something threatening them, or to tell their pups to hide from a potential threat.

All canines use vocalizations unique to their own species, and a few that are similar to other species, in order to communicate with each other and possibly with other species, as well.

Postural and Facial Communication

Wolves and other canines can also use physical expressions to communicate with each other. One such way of communicating is through facial expressions—examples being lip curls and ear positioning. Wolves use **lip curls** to tell each other not to do something or to provide a warning. The animals curl their lips in situations like dominance-play behavior, or when they are claiming food or a cache (hidden food).

Ear placement also has meaning for wolves. Researchers have studied ear positions enough to get a basic idea of a canine's mood or intentions by looking at the ears. **Ears** that are tipped back are typically a sign of discomfort or submission while ears tipped forward are a good indicator that some-

thing has caught the wolf's attention and interest. The "ears forward" wolf is alert and serious.

Researchers have also been able to recognize communication patterns in a wolf's **tail** position. A tail held high is a good indicator of confidence—it is typical in a dominant male or female, and observed in lower-ranking members occasionally. If the tail is just hanging, relaxed, then the wolf is probably relaxed, while a wagging tail is a good indicator of the wolf with excess energy that may begin to exhibit play or social behaviors. If the tail is positioned down next to the legs, but not tucked, then the wolf is starting to feel uncomfortable or losing confidence. If the tail is completely tucked between the legs, the wolf is extremely uncomfortable, lacking confidence or being submissive, depending on the context.

These physical behaviors are strong indicators of a wolf's mood or condition. They can be seen throughout a wolf's life in many different social or survival situations. ■

Word Search

Wolf Communication

Lip	Pack
Curl	Growl
Pitch	Lone
Ears	Bark
Chorus	Whine
Howl	Tail

W	Y	X	O	N	O	S	R	A	Y	B	J	H	E	U
Z	D	M	H	G	V	B	U	F	V	Z	L	L	L	L
N	Y	C	D	C	E	B	J	W	H	O	W	L	O	G
N	X	T	H	N	P	I	T	C	H	V	O	K	F	Q
O	M	Z	Y	P	L	P	N	C	A	I	S	K	I	S
O	P	B	V	J	A	E	R	D	B	E	N	T	B	M
L	R	D	B	J	W	C	H	O	R	U	S	E	Y	E
I	S	C	V	A	L	K	K	O	D	C	R	P	E	A
P	J	L	Z	Y	O	I	X	H	I	S	Q	I	H	R
C	G	C	I	C	N	P	X	B	C	F	C	Q	S	S
U	R	O	Y	Y	E	Y	T	O	Q	U	B	G	F	U
R	O	Y	T	T	J	T	J	V	E	C	F	U	W	B
L	W	G	I	V	A	L	N	D	A	X	C	X	Y	A
Y	L	T	A	I	L	I	I	A	I	O	O	B	L	R
Q	E	G	J	X	U	R	D	S	T	L	H	V	I	K