



Feeding the Pack: Six Steps to Mealtime

By Kyle Mrak

Wolves in the wild are constantly searching for their next meal.

Wolves are **carnivores**, and they usually hunt animals called **herbivores**. Whether their goal is to get food for themselves or to share with the pack and pups, hunting is a difficult task. There are six stages in a hunt, and we're going to take a look at each of them.



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1 The first stage is called the search.

Before wolves can hunt animals, they must find them. Wolves are very good at tracking prey using **olfaction**—they can smell prey from up to one-and-a-half miles away through the woods and maybe farther in open areas. Once they get closer to their prey, they use their hearing and eyesight to pinpoint where it is.



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Once wolves have found their prey, they move into the second stage of the hunt, called **stalking**. When wolves stalk their prey, they try to get as close as possible without letting the prey know they are there. The closer they get, the less energy they'll need to expend during the rest of the hunt.

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Eventually, the prey animals realize that wolves are nearby, and the third stage begins: **the encounter**. At this point, prey must decide whether to stand their ground or run away. Believe it or not, animals that stand their ground are more likely to survive a wolf hunt. It's their way of signaling to the wolves that they can defend themselves, so it's not a good idea to chase them.



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If prey animals decide to run, that begins the fourth stage: **the rush.**

During the rush, wolves begin to “test” their prey to see if any of them show weakness. They do this by rushing at their intended prey, trying to force them to move around. A prey animal that is injured, sick, old or weak can’t defend itself as well as a healthier individual, giving a wolf a better chance of success. The wolves will look carefully, but sometimes none of the prey animals show weakness.



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Whether their prey animal is weak or strong, when they’ve selected it, the fifth stage begins: **the chase!** Wolves can run up to 38 miles per hour, and they can keep running at that speed for as long as 20 minutes.



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In the sixth and final stage of the hunt—**the attack**—they make contact with their prey, trying to bring it down. While it may seem like the wolves have succeeded at this point, there is still a chance for prey to escape. Wolves typically hunt **ungulates**, which are animals with hooves, like white-tailed deer, elk and moose; they are very large, strong animals.

If the wolves successfully bring down their prey, it’s mealtime for the pack—but they are successful only about one out of five-to-ten times, so they are constantly searching for food. In a single meal, they can eat up to 20 percent of their body weight, which can be as much as 22 pounds of meat. ■



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Vocabulary

Carnivore An animal that eats meat

Herbivore An animal that eats plants

Olfaction The sense of smell

Ungulate A large, hooved animal, such as deer or moose

Wolf Hunt Maze

