



Nadleśnictwo Lubaczów



13. WOLF

WOLF (*Canis lupus*) – a predator, the largest European member of the canine family. A male can weigh up to 70–80 kg (in Poland, on average about 35–40 kg). Females are roughly 10–20% smaller. In natural conditions, their lifespan is up to about 12 years (in captivity, up to 16), though they usually live around 6–8 years. Since 1998, the wolf has been under strict protection throughout Poland.

APPEARANCE AND IDENTIFYING FEATURES

VIOLET GLAND

A black tuft of hair located about one-third of the way down from the base of the tail

NECK

Thick and strong, blending smoothly with the torso

HEAD

Large, with a broad forehead and long hair on the sides

EARS

Triangular; the fur behind them is reddish

"MANE"

On the nape, shoulders, and scapular region, formed by the longest hairs with dark tips

HAIR

Dense; typically rufous to reddish-brown, but may appear grey-rufous, grey-brown, or dark grey. The underside of the body is pale rufous or light grey

MUZZLE

Long and robust, pale along the sides

NOSE

Black

LIPS

Very dark

EYES

Slanted, outlined in black, with irises ranging from yellow to brown; the corners of the eyes are also black

TAIL

Held horizontally when showing aggression or dominance; in a neutral position, it hangs down

THE PACK – WOLF FAMILY STRUCTURE

Wolves are social predators. Nearly 90% live in family groups called packs—one of the most structured and enduring family systems among vertebrates. Packs in Poland are small, typically including 3–6 wolves. Within the group, there is a clear dominance hierarchy that determines both breeding opportunities and priority access to food.

The strongest adult pair in the pack and the only one allowed to breed; they lead the entire group

Alpha male
("basior")

Alpha female
("wadera")

Beta male

A "caretaker" who helps look after the pups

Pups Born in the most recent litter.

Until they reach adolescence, all mature wolves in the pack help feed and raise them (providing food once they are weaned)

Subordinate individuals

Offspring of the alpha pair from previous years

Omega individual

The lowest-ranked wolf in the pack; either temporarily or permanently excluded, often attacked by other members

Non-related individual

May occasionally be accepted into the pack

AREAS WHERE WOLVES HAVE BEEN RECORDED

The good condition of forests and an increasing number of deer and wild boar support the growth of Poland's wolf population. Their numbers rise year by year; it is estimated that there are around 1,200 wolves in the country.

TERRITORY

In Poland, wolves occupy forested or forest-field landscapes. Territory size depends on factors such as prey abundance, pack size, and season. Each pack holds its own well-defined area, marking it with urine, scat, characteristic ground-scratching (leaving secretions from glands on the pads of the hind paws), and howling

Average pack territory size in Poland	90–150 km ²	200–400 km ²
Average wolf density per 100 km ²	1.5–4 wolves	2–2.5 wolves

TRACK

The drawn lines intersect the pads only slightly

The track is elongated; the side toe pads are triangular, pointed, often connected to the claws

The large metacarpal pad is heart-shaped

The distance between tracks is about 60 cm

Front paw (larger)

7-12 cm

7-9 cm

SENSES

HEARING

After smell, hearing is a wolf's most developed sense—16 times more acute than a human's. They can detect sounds at frequencies of about 25–80 kHz (humans: 20 Hz–20 kHz). In a forest, wolves can hear howls from up to 10 km away, so hearing plays an important role in communication, as does the position of the ears.

VISION

A wolf's eyesight is comparable to that of humans, though more monochromatic. It has excellently developed peripheral vision, and its eyes are adapted to detecting movement. Because about 95% of its retinal cells are rods and only 5% cones, a wolf sees well at night.

SENSE OF SMELL

A wolf's nose contains around 200 million olfactory receptors, making its sense of smell roughly a hundred times stronger than a human's.

