

Wolves and Wolf Hybrids

Hello From Wolftown!

I would be happy to help in any way I can to educate about Wolves and Wolf Hybrids.

If you are reading this you are either an animal control officer, humane society volunteer, wildlife rescue, dog rescue operation or a private individual with questions.

Let's all try to remember that we are in this together and hopefully our love and concern of animals will help us work together. But we must understand and listen to each of our own problems and needs. And we must use common sense and recognize that if we don't like a law we need to change it. The safety of people and animals and compassion should always be our highest goals.

First educate yourself that there are a **lot** of northern breed dogs out there! Try www.sleddogcentral.com for more information. A lot of dogs look wolfy but are true dogs!

Let's break some dog breeds into categories.

- Siberian Husky
- Alaskan Husky — Mixed breed, some leaner for speed racing, some heavier.
- Malamute
- Spitz, Samoyeds, True Eskimo
- McKenzie Husky — Alaskan, generally thought to be a mixed breed of freight sled dog
- Seppala — Siberian Husky — Smaller?
- Chow, Akita — These all can have yellow eyes
- Various Native breeds of sled dogs from Canada, Alaska and Siberia- Including The Siberian Laika and Greenland dog
- European Hybrids — Have a bit of wolf, look rather like German Shepherds.

PURE BRED WOLVES

Characteristics

- Does not have an upright broad forehead, but does have a sloping forehead.
- Head appears to slope more downward on neck. In other words the head and neck are set on lower than a dog.

- Massive canine teeth. REALLY! Big! No dog has teeth like this! No crowding of incisors very regularly spaced. Huge molars. Both Canis Lupus and Canis Familiarus have 42 teeth.
- Back is level. Point of hip to buttock is sloped more than a dog. A dog is more upright.
- Never has rear dew claws. Claws are generally dark. Even in lighter colored wolves the claws are not pink white.
- Paws are huge, outer toe is tadpole shaped. They do not have fur on the bottoms of their feet like some Malamutes do.
- From front angle chest appears narrow and feet turned out slightly, from rear slightly cow hocked, wrists very long and angled inward.
- Wolves travel in track.
- Tails do not curl.
- Ears do not flop and are smaller than German shepherds or Malamutes less triangular than Sibes.
- Never a spotted coat. (Piebald)
- The fur is less soft than a Malamute's and less stiff than a Siberian's. Very dense under fur, cannot get a wolf's skin wet. After they are a year old wolf fur seems to repel mud to a degree. Wolves shed out all their under coat. Unlike a malamute or Siberian, both of which retain some under coat.
- Wolves come into first heat at 2 years old. Then the females only cycle once a year, from Feb/March. Generally wolves breed around Valentines Day. Pups are born in or around May. Wolves are mature between the age of two and five.
- Even hand raised purebred wolves are extremely shy. Many northern dog breeds can be shy as well.
- Wolves are territorial and this characteristic increases with age.
- Wolves have eyes that vary from dark brown to light yellow; greenish is seen as well but never blue.

Keep in mind that MANY northern dog breeds are very shy and predatory. Also some northern breeds have tails that do not curl. Some DO have yellow eyes.

Vocalization

Wolves do not bark in the same manner as dogs. Not your typical dog bow wow—they make a buff buff kind of sound. They howl — a long drawn out sound unlike the yipping howl of coyotes or the woo-woo of Northern dog breeds. Male wolves have **extremely** deep voices. Wolves have a warning sound — a woouff wouuff type of howlish bark followed by a higher pitched drawn out howl sometimes accompanied by stamping of feet, half charges and ruff and hackle fur raised. Wolves whine, squeak and yap on occasion. The pups take about one to two years to learn to howl well and in the beginning make a variety of strange howls, yaps and quavers.

Howling occurs at AM and PM in a comfortable group of animals. Howling also occurs when wolves sound alarm or when trying to attract a mate. Woodland Park Zoo has wolves that do not seem to howl much. Most howling is in the autumn when the pack is starting to organize for their winter movements, although the captive groups I have seen do this as well. Howling also occurs in breeding season. Wolves are at their quietest in summer.

Wolves have very dense thick bone. Their heads and legs seem harder and tougher than dogs.

Wolves need a **lot** of meat to survive. A purebred wolf or high percentage hybrid would not do well on commercial dog food, and possibly would have the runs. Wolves can eat whole carcasses, including the hide, hooves, and hair. Their scat will have the fur of prey on the outside and bones and sharp bits on the inside. Wolves will usually not eat the stomach or intestines.

Wolves start a carcass from the rectum, flank or nose. Eating all internal organs except stomach first then the meat is eaten. Bones are cracked.

Wolves are very slender though robust. People are amazed in summer when they see them without their thick winter coats. They are surprisingly slender and long legged.

A wolf trotting looks like its floating they are naturally quiet on those big feet. Wolf fur on tail is rather a bottlebrush effect, with hairs sticking out rather than lying down along tail bone.

Around a wolf's face is a really glaring heart shaped facial mask, similar to some Malamutes and Siberians, though theirs are not as dramatic. The eye area is lighter.

Wolf hackles are very long in winter. Scent spots on base of tail and tip of tail and saddle marking is usually represented at least by a few darker hairs. (Northern dogs and German shepherds can have this as well. It is a primitive color. Like Buckskin or Grulla in horses.)

Nose is generally black, though inbreeding can produce pink noses

Wolves are very nervous and **shy** animals.

WOLF PUPS

Pups are born blind and deaf like all puppies. The mother will dig them a deep den. They are usually gray, dark gray, or light gray when born, with fuzzy fur rather than slick fur. Howling starts early. I have heard pups howl when only

seven days old. Wolf pups are fairly robust and vigorous, more so than dog pups. They try to find their place, social rank, in the litter at a very early age.

Facial marking in the baby fur can be seen at around two months. (This is the only time that you might see the heart shaped facial mask as the new fur grows in.) Wolf pups have teeth that are very sharp and more hooked than dog pups. The pup's fur for the first winter is thicker and fuller than a two-year-old adult.

Dog pups may be gray at birth with white belly and legs, pink toes and white claws. A wolf pup will never be a pure white like that. It will either be born very light gray, or very dark grey as in black wolves, and grow in a lighter or darker coat!

Raising purebred pups in captivity requires the pups to be removed from the mother at around twelve days old or the pups will not be able to be handled well. Imprinting makes wolves more apt to think people are wolves. When wolves mature this can be a problem.

Wolves should not be pets!

HYBRIDS

This section is based on a consensus with a group of my peers:

It is hard to breed a purebred wolf and a dog. Wolves consider dogs and coyotes prey, and this is nature's way of preventing hybridization in the wild unless there are **very** few wolves in a given area. In order to breed with dogs, captive wolf pups would have to be raised together with dog pups.

Most of the animals you see are very small percentage wolf that have been bred with wolves generations ago. In our opinion they are dogs.

The percentage thing gets a bit goofy. Genetics does not work like this. "My hybrid is 87% wolf." How can you logically come to that figure? I have seen true half bred wolves, which are the true hybrids. If they are bred back to dogs then they would be $\frac{1}{4}$. If bred back to wolves they would be $\frac{3}{4}$ and so on. But when you get them so mixed it is impossible to really count on characteristics to be accurate according to a percentage.

To me these are dogs. To USDA they are dogs.

(If you are breeding a purebred wolf you are doing so illegally. Such breeding requires a USDA permit. Why would you be using a wolf in breeding unless you were involved in an accredited release program and breeding pure wolves. For that you would need wildlife permits.)

A half-breed dog and wolf cross out of a **pure** female wolf would look more wolf

than dog as it has been in our experience wolf genes are dominant. This would make common sense from a biological point of view. Out of a pure female wolf that had not been handled the pups would be very shy.

(Some good pics of half breed wolves are in [Arctic Wild](#) by Lois Crisler)

Out of a handled female wolf unless the pups were removed from the mother very early they would still be very shy.

Out of a dog bitch the pups would still look very wolfy but perhaps not quite as shy.

A quarter bred hybrid is an animal out of a half-bred parent by a dog would retain a few wolf characteristics. These animals may be shy, like some northern breeds of dogs.

After a quarter wolf an eighth hybrid seem to become more northern dog. Pups from the same litter could look very different. To me an eighth hybrid or even a quarter hybrid is a dog.

THE LAW

To own a purebred wolf you need state fish and game license as required by the state you live in. Owning a wolf is illegal in some states and countries. It's also illegal in King County unless working under educational or federal USDA permits.

It is illegal to breed purebred wolves or exhibit them to the public without a USDA license, as a matter of federal law.

Personally I believe the owning of wild animals should be completely regulated by USDA, Fish and Game and AZS, and that no private person should be allowed to have a wild creature as a pet. Habitat preservation should be promoted. I believe this because of all the rescue that I am asked to do.

If someone wants to work with these animals they should take a test and pass exams developed by the agencies in charge, and **only** be doing so because of education or preservation of species

HYBRID LAW

Hybrid ownership is illegal in some states and counties according to percentage of wolf blood. (How do they determine this?) Again, USDA does not recognize **any** hybrid as a wild animal or exotic. **As far as the USDA is concerned, they are all dogs.**

I think that true high percentage hybrids should be classed separately and the

owners made to provide facilities in accordance to USDA standards. This would also take care of pures that are classed as hybrids through error.

If people wish to create a breed of hybrid dog out of the lower percentage, it has already been done in Europe.

All dogs are descended from the Eurasian Wolf.

Hybrids as they are now, do not breed as a true breed. Each animal is a unique individual. Some are good pets some are not. I know some animal control folks are just enforcing the law but I am trying to educate on both sides.

Another good rule of thumb is . . . if it looks like a wolf and acts like a wolf it is a wolf but . . .

If it looks like a dog and acts like a dog it is a dog and . . .

If it looks like a wolf and acts like a dog it is a dog and . . .

If it looks like a dog and acts like a wolf **and** a dog (predatory, shy, aggressive) it is a very tough dog or possibly a hybrid.

But here is the common sense part: if it bites and is aggressive then it will need to go into a sanctuary that is secure or be put down no matter what it is!.

I prefer to teach compassion but there are few facilities that can care for aggressive animals. So, animal rescues need to have something in place and communicate with the local and state agencies involved.

An animal that is fearful may not be acting in character. If you put two strange dogs together they may fight! I would never do that with two strange sled dogs!

Most animals brought to my attention as hybrids are in fact dogs. There are many people who sell mixed northern dogs as hybrids and make money doing so. There are also those who sell pure wolves and call them hybrids to make them "legal". This is very sad. Many northern breed dogs I fear are being destroyed as hybrids.

Most humane societies are starting no kill programs and are placing hybrids in sanctuaries. (No kill works very well with the public and promotes compassion and increases moral at shelters.)

Purebred wolves cannot be put down unless **no** sanctuary can be found.

Inbreeding in purebred wolves can produce some strange characteristics, such as more pronounced forehead and slightly curled tail. I have even heard of

piebald occurrences. Most purebred wolves, except from zoos and release programs, are inbred or at least line bred due to lack of animals.

A lot of illegal pure wolves are in poor health due to improper nutrition as pups. My motivation, along with my peers, for writing this is to increase knowledge and compassion. We are all volunteers and each of us have over 25 years experience working with wolves. We have seen a lot! There is a **lot** of argument in wolf/hybrid/dog groups. We do not want to go down the path of who knows more . . . we want to teach compassion, which makes our society better.

A good program for true hybrids might be to emulate the falconry program in the United States, where you can own animals after being apprenticed, pass a state and federal test and have your facilities inspected.

A problem about identifying hybrids: it is my understanding that **most** vets, humane society volunteers, zoo officials, and wildlife officials have not seen enough true hybrids to be able to correctly identify them as such. It is not a matter of going through a checklist, but rather the vision of the whole animal and its behavior and characteristics.

Just because a dog is tough, or territorial, or looks like a northern dog does not make it a hybrid. The Greenland dog, for instance, is a **very** tough northern dog, and the strict laws in Greenland reflect this.

In regards to human safety with domesticated dogs, perhaps all dogs should be treated the same. If a dog is not safe then it should be dealt with in a humane way. There are behavioral tests that can be given by canine experts to determine behavior.

Let's try to work together and use common sense and give each other the benefit of the doubt. We should also try to communicate more so we can help dogs and wolves. The best thing I always ask people is, "Why would anyone want a wolf as a pet?"

If you love wolves the best thing to do is preserve habitat.

Humanity has been domesticating dogs from between 10,000 to 100,000 years depending to who you talk to. A wolf is not a dog, nor should he be.

To quote Ghandi, "You will know a Nation by how it treats its children and animals."

RESCUE

Wolftown can only rescue pure wolves that have been verified as pure by zoo vets, wolf biologists, or some other qualified expert.

A good source to find northern dog rescue is www.petfinder.org

Another source of rescue is some wildlife rehabilitation facilities which have educational programs that might take hybrids.
Look on the Internet for wildlife rehabilitation centers in your area.

Katie@mybluedog.net sometimes has good referrals.

If you are trying to find a sanctuary for wolf hybrids, make sure that they are 501c3 non-profit organization, and confirm that they are not breeding and have a board of directors. You can check their non-profit status with the IRS.