

## On the Hunt

by Jess Edberg, International Wolf Center Intern



Humans use cash to acquire their food, but wolves have to pay for their groceries directly through hard work.

Lynn and Donna Rogers, www.bearstudy.org

**D**o you know how much your family spends on groceries each week? Humans work and use the cash they earn to acquire their food, but wolves have to pay for their groceries directly through hard work.

Wolves hunt in several stages. First, they must *locate* their prey. They can do this in a variety of ways. Wolves can use direct scenting—finding the scent of their prey and following it. They can have a chance encounter and just happen to come across prey animals. They can track their prey, and in open areas they can see it. Direct scenting is the most common way wolves find their food because they have a powerful sense of smell. Scientists think wolves can smell a prey animal up to one and a half miles away!

Second, wolves usually *stalk* their prey after they locate it. During the stalk, wolves try to approach the prey without being heard or seen. This can

be tricky depending on the direction of the wind and the wolves' location to the prey. Prey animals are wary and alert to their surroundings and, like wolves, have keen senses of smell and hearing, so wolves must be stealthy and controlled during the stalk.

During the third stage the wolves *encounter* the prey. The wolves and prey confront each other in a crucial moment: the prey's response to the wolves' closing in determines if the hunt continues. If the prey animal stands its ground, it is signaling that it has nothing to fear because it is healthy and confident that the hungry wolves are no threat. A healthy adult deer or moose is capable of defending itself effectively with sharp, pointy hooves.

This is why wolves are opportunists, meaning that they are most likely to catch the sick, weak, old and young animals because they take the least amount of work to hunt and kill, and bring the least risk. Because wolves eat every few days, they must not waste energy!

Usually wolves will continue the hunt only if their prey runs. This initiates the next stage: the *rush*. During this important stage the wolves must close in on their prey before it has the chance to sprint away. If they are able to catch up, the rush turns into the *chase*. The chase can last from 13 feet to 13 miles but is usually less than a mile.

Once the wolves are close enough, they will *attack*. The attack is the last stage of the hunt, but even after getting this far, a wolf may still not eat. A healthy, adult moose can easily shake off three wolves that are biting it! A wolf will typically bite the rump,

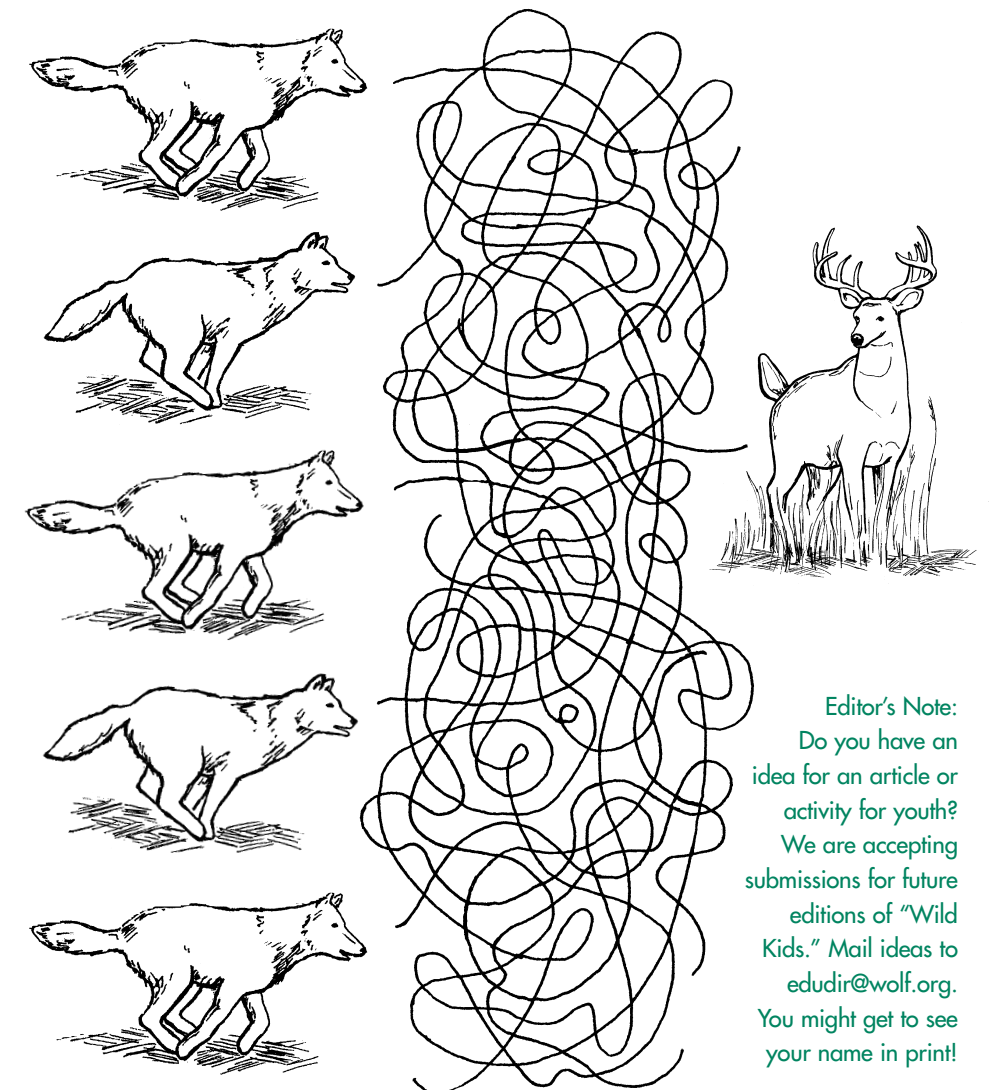
neck or nose of the prey animal because these areas are the farthest away from thrashing hooves, which in one kick can kill a wolf. Wolves are sometimes injured or even killed when trying to catch food.

If the prey animal is large, there may be enough food for every

member of the pack. In some cases, there may even be leftovers. A wolf may dig a hole in the ground and hide this extra food. Humans call these holes food caches. These caches provide the wolves with "midnight snacks" or possibly something to tide them over in times of hard hunting. ■

### Try this: Which wolf gets dinner?

Can you guess which wolf finds the prey? Follow the lines to see if you're right!



**Editor's Note:** Do you have an idea for an article or activity for youth? We are accepting submissions for future editions of "Wild Kids." Mail ideas to [edudir@wolf.org](mailto:edudir@wolf.org). You might get to see your name in print!

## WOLF WORK

**PERSON:** Jess Edberg

**JOB TITLE AND DESCRIPTION:**

Diagnostic Laboratory Technician. Tasks include working in a laboratory that evaluates tissue samples of various wildlife species to detect disease. Technician prepares samples by classifying them, dissecting them (sometimes cutting apart a deer skull!), and labeling them. Keeping the lab clean, organized and stocked with supplies is also important.

**TRAINING REQUIRED:** Minimum two years of post-high school coursework involving lab procedures in courses such

as chemistry, biology and animal anatomy. Bachelor's degree preferred.

**SKILLS NEEDED TO DO THE JOB:**

Adherence to specific protocols and safety rules; ability to communicate detailed information, pay attention to detail, be organized, and train new employees.

**ADVICE TO KIDS:** Take extra science classes such as wildlife biology and animal anatomy and physiology. Practice following specific procedures by doing household chores routinely or following a homework study schedule. Try doing animal dissections, either with your class or as a science project.



Jess Edberg, a diagnostic laboratory technician, is currently an intern at the International Wolf Center.