

# Seasons of the Red Wolf:

## Summer

By the time they are six to eight weeks old, wolf pups are exploring outside the den. Their natural curiosity makes them anxious to explore under the supervision of the adults who never allow them to stray too far from safety.

By early summer, the pups are too active to stay around the den and still too young to hunt and to keep up with the adults. The pups and their mother abandon the den, and the pups are moved to a **rendezvous site** for the next stage in their development. This move can take place when the pups are as young as three weeks, particularly if the adults have been disturbed. Typically, however, the pups are moved between eight and ten weeks of age.

The rendezvous site is often an open area with a water source and a cluster of trees or rocks for shelter. A wolf pack may remain at one rendezvous site throughout the summer months, or it may move to several of these "resting places." Here, in the relative safety of a sheltered spot, the adventurous pups begin to learn the skills they will need to survive. Wolf childhood is long because there is so much to learn. The pups are watched over by the adults, but despite their constant care, a wolf pup has only a 50 percent chance of surviving its first year. Other **predators** may kill young pups, or they may die of starvation and disease. By late summer, the pups are large and strong. Soon they will be able to travel with the adults.

Wolves live by strict rules of cooperation, and frequent reinforcement of who is dominant and who is submissive keeps relationships peaceful and harmonious among the pack members. Adults discipline unruly pups by pinning them to the ground

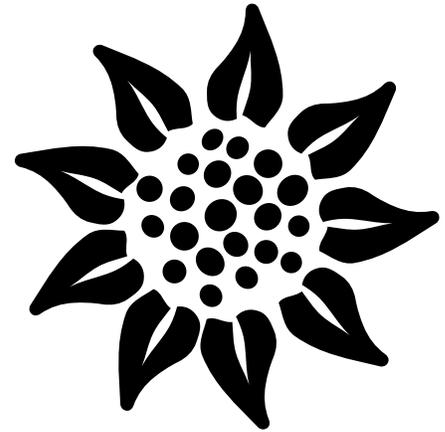
with a paw or mouth. Pups establish a hierarchy among themselves by playing with bones and tugging at pieces of hide. Timid pups are routinely bossed by the more dominant siblings.

### A Wolf Pack is a Family

A pack may consist of just two wolves, a male and a female that have bonded and become a pair. When they have a pup or pups, the family has expanded - just like a human family! Both parents care for the pups. The breeding male (historically called the alpha male) hunts and brings food to the breeding female (historically called the alpha female) while she is confined to the den nursing the pups. As the pups are slowly weaned from milk to solid food, the parents regurgitate partially digested meat to the young wolves. Fresh meat is brought to the rapidly maturing youngsters by the mother and father.

Older brothers and sisters (one, two and even three-year-olds) may live with the pack. These siblings, young adults that have not left the pack (dispersed) to find mates of their own, are subordinate to their parents and dominate over the new pups of the current year. They also bring food to the pups, and often they function as "nannies" or babysitters while the rest of the pack hunts.

While wolves seem to have distinct personalities with some being more dominant and others more submissive, there is little internal strife within the family. Wolves do not waste precious energy fighting among themselves, although they will fiercely defend their territory against other wolf packs and lone wolves. The parents are in charge, and their status is reinforced through body posture, tail position and ritual pinning. However, serious aggression among family members and challenges to the breeding pair are rare. It is believed that the more dominant and assertive siblings disperse to find mates of their own and start new families.



## Vocabulary

1. rendezvous site
2. communicate
3. hierarchy
4. predators