

Mogens Eliasen:  
"The Wolf's Natural Diet – a Feeding Guide for Your Dog?"

## **Traveling and eating manners**

Wolves generally travel when they are hungry. They don't just start eating – food has to be hunted down first...



Wolves do not go to the fridge or to McDonalds when they get hungry – they start *traveling* in order to find suitable hunting opportunities. There is no such thing as “free lunch” or “free feeding” for a carnivore in Nature... Their gastrointestinal system is ideally suited for dealing with large periods of no food supply at all, interspersed with large meals in-between – an extremely unhealthy way of eating for a *human*, but extremely appropriate and healthy for a wolf and a dog!

(Photo: Lars Madsen)

Although there are some documented examples of wolves killing more than they can eat (typically when they can access sheep or turkey farms<sup>1</sup>), they

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. David Mech referred to the official stats for Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana where wolves have been re-introduced over the past two decades: out of 3,700,000 cows and sheep, a maximum of 200 were killed by wolves during times when weather conditions alone killed more than 120,000...

Also, in Minnesota, the US state with the most wolves (about 3,000), less than 1% of all farmers have ever been affected by the wolves.

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generally do not kill unless they are in the mood for hunting. They are very selective about what they try to kill, and they clearly want all hunting to be on *their* terms, not on the terms of some accidental circumstances that will not give them the optimal chance of success.

When they have their stomachs filled, they simply do not hunt. When their stomachs are done digesting, they start traveling – and that sets them in the mood for hunting.

Although the wolf pack is traveling mainly to find a worthy large ungulate they can kill (their preference), they will catch and kill all kinds of smaller animals they meet on their way, including birds, mice, chipmunks, squirrels, gophers, etc. – and they will also empty a bird's nest, eat some fruits and vegetables, and dung from their prey. Even grass! As supported by David Mech's observations, they have never been seen gorging on vegetable matter, though, but they certainly also don't leave it untouched, particularly when the hunt is dragging out and they are hungry.

Travel distances are typically 25-50 km a day (15-30 miles), but there are records of more than twice as much. Over several weeks, wolves are known to have traveled 1000 km from where they were collared.

**Using brain work instead of muscle power**

For a wolf to get a meal when it is hungry is not quite as simple as it is for a human that knows where the fridge is... When the wolf pack discovers a potential prey, they first have to get within chasing distance or stalk it – and that alone fails more often than it leads to success, as wolves cannot run as fast as a healthy individual of their preferred prey. An adult wolf in good shape can run about 50-55 km/h (35 miles/hour) – but a healthy deer can easily reach 70 km/h (45 miles/hour)... Elk and caribou are slightly slower, yet still much faster than a wolf. With moose, bison and musk ox, the wolf is still at a disadvantage in terms of speed – and now it also has some mighty power against it in a fight, and even deer can kill wolves!

This whole format of things doesn't look very promising at all for a hungry carnivore....

*(To be continued)*