

# Animal Populations: What's the Difference?

## OBJECTIVE:

To learn the difference between endangered wild animals and overpopulated companion animals.

## ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

Read the book, *Wolves in Yellowstone*, and discuss why wolves are endangered and why companion animals have an overpopulation problem. Students will write a report about the two situations and compare and contrast them.

## MATERIALS:

🐾 **Book:** *Wolves in Yellowstone*, by Randy Houk and The Humane Society of the United States (if your librarian can't locate this book, you can order it through your local bookstore, or through the publisher: The Benefactor, (847) 919-1703, [www.readplay.com](http://www.readplay.com))

## ACTIVITY:

### Preliminary Discussion

- 🐾 What's the difference between a wild animal and a companion animal? Ask for examples of both.
- 🐾 How are people involved in the lives of wild animals? Emphasize that people need to protect the habitats of wild animals, keep their environments healthy and make sure they don't become "threatened" or "endangered."
- 🐾 How are people involved in the lives of companion animals? Emphasize that companion animals, like cats and dogs, have been domesticated for thousands of years and depend on people for all of their needs.
- 🐾 Define "population" and discuss the difference between the populations of wild animals and companion animals. In a "natural" environment, wild animal populations control themselves, but because companion animals are dependent on people, their populations need to be controlled by people.
- 🐾 Why are some populations of wild animals "threatened" or "endangered?" Discuss pollution, urban sprawl, hunting and poaching which have contributed to the endangerment and extinction of many species.

The following animals are included on the endangered species list by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Gray Wolves, Grizzly Bears, Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers, and American Crocodiles (you can find a complete list of endangered and threatened species on the internet at <http://eelink.net/EndSpp/>).

- 🐾 Discuss pet overpopulation and explain that because people haven't done a good job of controlling the populations of cats and dogs, there aren't enough homes for all of them. Dogs, cats and rabbits need to be spayed or neutered so that they don't keep reproducing. When a female animal is spayed, her entire reproductive system is removed, including her uterus, ovaries and oviducts. When a male animal is neutered, his testicles are removed. These are simple surgical procedures which are generally painless and rarely have any negative side effects.

### Procedure

Read the book, *Wolves in Yellowstone*. Discuss why Gray Wolves became endangered, myths and fables about wolves, how these legends have affected wolves and what has been done to protect this species to make it strong again. Compare this to the pet overpopulation problem and explain that the Dumb Friends League takes in 22,000+ companion animals every year because there simply are not enough homes for all of these pets. Discuss what is being done to control the pet over-

population problem and how everyone in the community can help to protect endangered and overpopulated animals. Have the students write a report about the various problems that plague wild and companion animals and the contrast between the two situations.

### **Post-Discussion**

- 🐾 What are the similarities and the differences in both situations?
- 🐾 Why is it difficult for people to manage these populations?
- 🐾 Name some animals that have been taken off the "threatened" or "endangered" lists and why.
- 🐾 Is it possible that companion animals will ever become endangered?
- 🐾 What will it take for the companion animal populations to be controlled?

### **EXTENSION ACTIVITY:**

Arrange for a tour of the Dumb Friends League to learn more about the pet overpopulation problem and what the League is doing to help resolve it.