

What's Wild About African Wild Dogs?

By: Catherine Clarke Fox

What's the difference between African wild dogs and the dogs we know as pets? For one thing, African wild dogs, which live in Africa, south of the Sahara desert, only have four toes, while domestic dogs and wolves have five. But you wouldn't want to count for yourself, because these are truly wild animals.



Wild dogs are not somebody's domestic dogs that ran away and didn't come back, although some people used to think that," explains Dr. "Tico" McNutt, who studies these animals at Wild Dog Research Camp in the African country of Botswana. "They are actually Africa's wolf, and just like wolves, they do not make good pets. They need to be out in the wild doing what they are supposed to be doing - ranging many miles every day and hunting to find the food they need to survive and feed pups."

In fact, they travel so far that researchers use radio collars to keep track of them. The collars send out radio signals that tell people where the dogs are. African wild dogs are a separate species from domestic dogs: *Lycaon pictus*, which means painted, wolf-like animal. No two wild dogs have the same pattern to their coats, so it is easy to tell them apart.

Roaming through grasslands, savannas, and wooded areas, they hunt gazelles and other antelopes, baby wildebeests, warthogs, birds, and rats. Incredible hunters, they can run up to 35 miles per hour (56 kilometers per hour).

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African wild dogs are smart and sociable, like pet dogs. They enjoy each others' company and live in packs of about six to 20 animals. Both males and females look out for young dogs and make sure they have food. Dr. McNutt was surprised to learn that they like pups so much, they will even take care of orphans that don't belong to them.

African wild dogs talk to each other with two common types of calls, says Dr. McNutt. "The 'hoo' call is a call that they make when lost or when a pack member is missing. It sounds almost like an owl." The dogs can hear the call two or three miles away and easily find each other.

On the other hand, says Dr. McNutt, "The twitter calls are intended to carry only very short distances, and are used to wake up the pack members and rally them to go hunting. They are very high pitched and sound almost like songbird calls."

There's one huge difference between domestic or pet dogs and African wild dogs. Millions of domestic dogs live on the planet, but there are probably fewer than 6,000 African wild dogs left.

Lions and hyenas eat them, but most of all, African wild dogs are threatened by people. Humans hunt them, and ranchers and farmers who don't want them going after cows and sheep poison them. Humans are also destroying the wild, natural habitat they need to survive.

Researchers like Dr. McNutt are working to help people understand how rare and special these animals are. Today more ranchers are finding other ways to protect their cows and sheep from African wild dogs instead of killing the rare and special animals.

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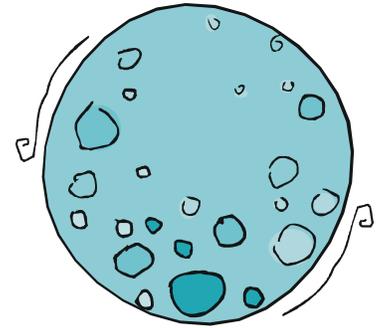
Read the story. Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. In the sentence, "Wild dogs are not somebody's domestic dogs that ran away and didn't come back," what does the word, "domestic" mean?
 - A. Wild
 - B. Circus
 - C. Home
 - D. Hot
2. How do researchers keep track of how far wild dogs travel?
 - A. They hunt them
 - B. They use radio collars
 - C. They use infrared goggles
 - D. They live with them
3. "Lycaon pictus" is the scientific name for the African wild dog, which means:
 - A. The spotted bearded lady
 - B. The queen of the hunt
 - C. Painted, wolf-like animal
 - D. The queen thought the princess looked tired
4. What is the purpose of the twitter call?
 - A. To wake up the pack to go hunting
 - B. To chat online with 140 characters or less
 - C. When they are lost or a dog is missing
 - D. Something bad is about to happen
5. Other than lions and hyenas, what is the biggest threat to African wild dogs?
 - A. Starvation
 - B. Not getting enough sleep
 - C. Tigers, Leopards, and Wolves
 - D. Humans and habitat destruction

Is Pluto a Planet?

By: National Geographic Kids (Adapted by Have Fun Teaching)

Many people are saying that Pluto is no longer a planet. Are they right? Is Pluto no longer a planet? There's debate in the scientific world about this issue. National Geographic News says that, according to the International Astronomical Union, a full-fledged planet is an object that orbits the sun and is large enough to have become round due to the force of its own gravity. Because Pluto doesn't meet these standards, the IAU classifies Pluto as a dwarf planet.



Not everyone agrees that this is a good way to decide, though. Andy Cheng, a planetary scientist at Johns Hopkins University, says that the new rules aren't clear enough and asks the question "how round is round? ...I'll still continue to maintain that Pluto is a planet," he said.

Owen Gingerich is an astronomer and historian at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and head of the IAU committee proposing the definition. He favored a special distinction for Pluto. Gingerich supported a proposal to call the big eight planets classical planets—as opposed to just plain "planets"—and Pluto and the others dwarf planets, so there would be two classes of planets. He believes that reclassifying Pluto as a dwarf planet is not "sensitive to the historical and cultural role that Pluto has played."

The argument continues. In the meantime, however, many people are correct—new textbooks will list Pluto as being a dwarf planet. What do you think it is?

Is Pluto a Planet?

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Read the story. Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. According to the IAU, what classifies Pluto as a dwarf planet?
 - A. It is smaller than the other planets
 - B. It does not orbit the sun
 - C. It is not large enough to become round due to the force of its own gravity
 - D. Both B and C
2. What does IAU stand for?
 - A. International Association of the Universe
 - B. Intergalactic Association Union
 - C. International Astronomical Union
 - D. International House of Pancakes
3. What does Andy Cheng think about the IAU's definition of a planet?
 - A. He thinks the IAU is not clear enough about the roundness of a planet
 - B. He thinks that Pluto is not a planet
 - C. He thinks that Pluto is not round enough to be considered a planet
 - D. He thinks the IAU gives a clear definition of a planet
4. What did Owen Gingerich support?
 - A. A proposal to call the eight planets "planets"
 - B. A proposal to call the eight planets "dwarf planets"
 - C. A proposal to call the eight planets "classical planets"
 - D. A proposal to call Pluto a "classical planet"
5. What is the Author's Purpose of this article?
 - A. To inform the reader
 - B. To tell a story
 - C. To persuade the reader
 - D. To expose the beliefs of the author