

Your dog's wild side

6 everyday habits and the wild instinct behind each. Tick the ones you spot this week.



☐ Why does my dog sniff everything?

THE WILD SIDE Dogs have up to 300 million scent receptors; people have about 6 million. A sniff is how a dog reads the world.

NOTICE About 12% of each sniff takes a side path straight to a deep scent chamber at the back of the nose.



☐ Why does my dog howl?

THE WILD SIDE Howling is long-distance talk for wolves: it keeps the pack in touch, marks territory and helps them find each other.

NOTICE In Yellowstone, a wolf howl can be heard about 6.6 miles away in forest and 9.6 miles across open ground.



☐ Do twitching paws mean a dream?

THE SCIENCE Sleep recordings of family dogs show the same main stages people have, including REM, so many scientists think dogs may dream.

NOTICE In one study, dogs that napped after learning new command words remembered them better.



☐ Why does my dog love a full-speed run?

THE WILD SIDE Your dog's wild cousin, the gray wolf, cruises at about 5 mph and can sprint at up to 35 mph.

NOTICE Yellowstone wolf packs patrol home ranges that average about 165 square miles, so travel runs deep in the family.



☐ Why does my dog stare at me?

THE WILD SIDE In a Japanese study, owners' oxytocin, a bonding hormone, rose after their dogs gazed at them. Hand-raised wolves did not have that effect.

NOTICE Dogs have a small muscle that lifts the inner eyebrow into 'puppy eyes'. Wolves mostly lack it.



☐ What is my dog's wag really saying?

THE WILD SIDE A wag shows excitement, not always happiness. Dogs wagged more to the right for their owner, more to the left for an unfamiliar dominant dog.

TRY THIS When you come home, stand behind or in front of your dog and watch: does the wag lean to your dog's right?

Your dog's wild side: sources

Each line on the poster summarizes the research below. Where the science is not settled, the poster says “may” or “think.”

Sources

Why does my dog sniff everything?

Craven, Paterson & Settles (2010), *J. Royal Society Interface* 7: 933-943; PBS NOVA

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/dog-smell-olfaction-nose>

Why does my dog howl?

U.S. National Park Service, *Yellowstone Wolf Facts and 'Why Wolves Howl'* (Yellowstone Science 24-1)

<https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/ys-24-1-yellowstone-wolf-facts.htm> · <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/ys-24-1-why-wolves-howl.htm>

Do twitching paws mean a dream?

Kis et al. (2014), *Physiology & Behavior* 130: 149-156; Iotchev et al. (2017), *Scientific Reports* 7: 12936 (Eotvos Lorand University)

<https://ethology.elte.hu/en/content/sleep-dependent-learning-in-dogs.t.34516>

Why does my dog love a full-speed run?

U.S. National Park Service, *Yellowstone Wolf Facts* (Yellowstone Science 24-1)

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Why does my dog stare at me?

Nagasawa et al. (2015), *Science* 348: 333-336; Kaminski et al. (2019), *PNAS* 116: 14677-14681; PBS NOVA

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/puppy-dog-eyes>

What is my dog's wag really saying?

Quaranta, Siniscalchi & Vallortigara (2007), *Current Biology* 17: R199-R201; Siniscalchi et al. (2013), *Current Biology*

<https://www.nature.com/news/2007/070319/full/news070319-6.html>

How to use this poster

1. Print page 1 at home on Letter or A4 paper (“fit to page” is fine). Card stock looks best.
2. Stick it on the fridge or by the leash hook.
3. Tick a box each time you spot a habit this week. For the wag, watch which way it leans when you come home.

Keep going, free: why dogs circle before lying down, wait by the door and sniff on every walk, at petwildside.com/why.
Want all 12 dog habits as wall art? See petwildside.com/shop.