

Meet the Family

We've created Zoo Tracks to guide your educational visit to Lincoln Park Zoo, complete with animal descriptions to prompt discussions with your students.

Some animals prefer to live alone while others live in groups, small and large. In this installment of Zoo Tracks—Meet the Family—we focus on the differences between solitary and social animals

On their own...

Solitary animals are usually alone. They do not spend much time with other members of their species, except when they are breeding or raising young. If space and food are plentiful, solitary animals may live near each other. When this happens, they may share resources but do not necessarily interact with one another.

...or grouped together.

Animal societies can be organized in many different ways. Some animals live in family groups in which parents and young live together. With some species, males are in charge of the family group. With others, females lead. Some groups can be very large and include many families. Large groups offer protection from predators, make acquiring food easier and can provide an opportunity to share the care of offspring. Whether a colony of ants or a pride of lions, living in a group offers advantages.

What Now?

At the Zoo...

Apply what you learned about animal lifestyles. See if you can identify animals living in groups or alone throughout the zoo.

Back at Home...

The zoo isn't the only place you can learn about animal groupings. Try one of these activities back in the classroom or in your neighborhood. You might want to record your discoveries in a science notebook like a zoologist would!

- Observe dogs interacting at a local park. Do they prefer to play alone or interact with each other? What does this tell you about their preferred lifestyle?
- Spend time watching a domestic cat. Does this animal prefer to be in a group or stay solitary?
- Follow a trail of ants. How do they appear to work together?

Want to Know More?

Lincoln Park Zoo has numerous education programs that can help you learn even more about our zoo animals and their wild relatives. To discover what's coming up, visit our web site at: www.lpzoo.org/education.



Let's Make Tracks!

Visit these five species to learn more about solitary and social animals. Start with #1 and work your way through the zoo!

If an animal is not visible on the day of your visit, simply add an exhibit of your choice.

1. Chilean Flamingos



Flamingos live in large flocks of males, females and young. In the wild these large groups offer protection, making it less likely for an individual animal to be picked out by a predator. During the breeding season, the entire flamingo flock participates in group displays. Flamingos then pair up to build mud mound nests. If you are visiting in the spring or summer months, you might see these nests.

- Do you see any birds that seem to be a pair?

2. Dwarf Mongoose



These social animals live in groups of up to forty individuals. A dominant female is in charge of the group and is usually the only one that breeds and gives birth. The entire group works together to help the dominant female care for the young.

- Which do you think might be the dominant female? Why?

3. Red Devil Cichlids



These fish live in groups, but prefer to pair off when mating and raising young. Males, easily identified by the large bump on their heads, may fight over females and protect their territory. Both males and females aggressively protect newly laid eggs and hatchlings.

- Can you locate any male fish protecting a specific area of the exhibit—their territory?

4. Red Wolves



These animals usually live in small family groups of two parents and their offspring, which may be of different ages. The female will keep wolf pups safe in a den for the first few weeks after they are born. As they grow, they may stay with their parents for one to two years before venturing out to create their own pack.

- Can you find an area of the exhibit our wolves might use as a den?

5. Black Bears



Black bears prefer to be solitary and are usually seen together only during mating season or if a mother is caring for cubs. Plentiful food may attract many bears to the same place, but they still distance themselves from one another. Our bears receive ample food, which enables them to share their living space comfortably.

- Do you see the bears interacting with each other?
- Do the bears seem to prefer specific areas of the exhibit?

