



# At Home with the Jackals

When it comes to caring for their young, Africa's silver-backed jackals are top dogs.



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Life can be scary when you're a little dog in a big, wide-open world. Good thing these *silver-backed jackal* pups have a cozy den they can dive into at a moment's notice. All jackals belong to the dog family, and silver-backed jackals (also called black-backed jackals) live in the grasslands, woods, and deserts of southern and eastern Africa. These pups don't seem too worried about the *wildebeest* (WILL-duh-beest) herd at their doorstep. Maybe that's because the wildebeests don't pose a threat. Or maybe it's because the pups have their own personal bodyguards: a very protective mom and dad (circle).





## Equal Partners

Like all silver-backed jackal pairs, Mom and Dad likely will stay together for life. And they will share puppy duty almost equally—something that's pretty rare in the animal world.

Mom gives birth to one to nine pups at a time. Then she spends the next few weeks nursing and protecting them around the clock. She hardly ever leaves the den. So Dad brings food back to his hungry mate. He hunts and eats just about anything he can find: rodents, insects, snakes, and even small antelope. Then he heads home. Back at the den, he barfs up dinner for his waiting mate. In a jackal family, that's love!

**But Dad, I'm not THAT dirty!** The jackal father at right licks his five-week-old pup clean. Unlike many other animal pairs, jackal moms and dads share grooming duties.

## Super Dad

Soon the babies are old enough to eat food other than Mom's milk. That's when Dad starts doing more "paws-on" parenting. He brings food for the entire family (and spits it up on demand). He grooms and plays with his pups. And whenever a hungry hyena (hy-EE-nuh)



**What's for breakfast?** Barf, of course. The jackal dad at left coughs up some pre-chewed meat for his pups. What's the next meal? Grass rat (above).



or other threat comes too close, he and Mom will chase it off—even if it's as much as five times their size. A full-grown silver-backed jackal weighs only about 15 pounds—as much as a miniature poodle. But when it comes to guarding their pups, these dogs are big on attitude.

## Brotherly and Sisterly Love

Most silver-backed jackal pups leave their parents when they are about eight months old. But some stick around for another year and help take care of the next litter. They feed, groom, and protect the pups—just as Mom and Dad do! Not all jackal

families have brother and sister helpers. But scientists found that more pups survive in families that do. And the helpers learn skills that make them better moms and dads when they have pups of their own.





**Playtime!**

The pup above romps through the grass with a wildebeest tail. The wildebeest wasn't killed by a jackal—jackals are too small to hunt such big animals. But they are great at stealing bits of other animals' meals.

## *Growing Up Jackal*

Jackal parents take great care of their pups. But eventually their little ones have to grow up and find someplace else to call home. So the pups practice the skills they will need when they live on their own. They spend hours every day chasing, wrestling, and playing tug-of-war

with their parents and brothers and sisters. Sounds like fun, but it's also how jackal pups learn to hunt and fight. Soon, these tiny tough guys will be grown-up jackals, ready to leave the safety of home—and start jackal families of their own. 🐾

**Jackals just wanna have fun.** If you stalked, tackled, and bit your brother, you'd probably get in trouble! But for the jackal pups below, this kind of play is an important way to get stronger and tougher.

