

Distinctions between species can be arbitrary.

The gray wolf, coyote, red wolf, and domestic dog can all freely interbreed with one another, will produce fertile offspring, and they sometimes do so without human intervention. The coyote is rather arbitrarily considered a separate species from the gray wolf. The nearly extinct red wolf's status (as a separate species, a subspecies of gray wolf, or as a gray wolf/coyote hybrid) is not agreed upon and is politically contentious: recognition as a separate species affects its legal protection. The domestic dog lost its recognition as a separate species in 1993, and is now considered a subspecies of gray wolf.

The situation would get all the murkier if we were to try to agree on the separate-species status of, say, an ancestor to these dogs that lived two million years ago. There would be no way to draw a hard line between one species and another, unless we were willing to accept that some animals were a different species from their parents



gray wolf



coyote



red wolf



dog