**Dire Wolf (Canis dirus)**

**Overview**

The dire wolf is an extinct species of the genus *Canis* that lived during the Late Pleistocene to early Holocene epochs (around 250,000 to 9,000 years ago). Despite their fame, they are not direct ancestors of modern wolves but rather a distinct species.

**Classification**

* Scientific name: *Canis dirus*
* Family: Canidae
* Genus: Canis (same as dogs, wolves, coyotes)
* Status: Extinct (~9,000 years ago)

**Physical Characteristics**

* **Size:** Larger and stockier than modern gray wolves
* **Weight:** Approximately 150 to 200 lbs
* **Teeth:** Powerful jaws and strong teeth suited for bone crushing
* **Build:** Shorter limbs, more robust skeleton compared to gray wolves

**Habitat & Range**

* Lived in North and South America
* Common fossil sites: La Brea Tar Pits (California), Florida, Mexico
* Preferred grasslands, plains, and forested regions rich in large herbivores such as bison, camels, and mammoths

**Diet**

* Carnivorous
* Preyed on megafauna (giant prehistoric animals)
* Likely hunted and scavenged in packs
* Adapted to take down large prey and crush bones

**Extinction**

* Went extinct around 9,000 years ago
* Causes:
  + Climate change after the Ice Age
  + Extinction of their primary prey
  + Competition with smaller, faster wolves and early humans

**Genetics & Myth Busting**

* Not a direct ancestor of modern gray wolves or domestic dogs
* Recent DNA studies show dire wolves were genetically distinct
* Belonged to a different evolutionary branch from gray wolves

**Pop Culture**

* Popularized by HBO’s *Game of Thrones* (fictionalized and magical versions)
* Frequently depicted in fantasy RPGs and prehistoric documentaries