

Unearthed Arcana: Ranger

The ranger has been a part of Dungeons & Dragons since almost the beginning, and it remains one of the most popular classes in the game. However, feedback on fifth edition D&D has shown that the ranger lags behind the other classes in terms of power and player satisfaction.

In looking at the history of the ranger, the class is very much a victim of the game's changing core mechanics. In the early days, the ranger started with the basic chassis of the fighter, added elements of other classes, and introduced its own unique mechanics. Over time, though, the game's core rules have grown more comprehensive and flexible. And as they have, several of the key elements that set rangers apart—including fighting with two weapons, tracking, and stealth—became available to any character.

That change left the ranger leaning on a narrow selection of unique mechanics, most notably those that gave the character a set of benefits against a specific type of opponent. Such a mechanic works well if it augments an already strong foundation for a character class, such as a cleric's ability to turn undead. However, that kind of benefit is too situational to serve as the class's signature ability.

The ranger has also featured an animal companion in previous editions of the game, but giving a player what amounts to a second character to play is difficult to balance in a satisfying way. The feedback we've received indicates that many players feel too restricted by the Beast Master ranger's companion. It doesn't feel logical or satisfying to have a companion that sits still unless a ranger actively commands it.

The following revised design of the ranger builds on the class's unique traits, creating a new set of class features for 1st level to 5th level. These features are designed to make the ranger feel distinct and interesting while still remaining true to its identity within the game. Before we dive into the details, here are some notes on how the design came together.

Design Notes

The ranger presented here was built around a small number of concepts that define the class. These concepts serve to make the class distinct and create a cohesive sense of the ranger's place in the world.

Skirmishers

Rangers are skirmishers. They avoid direct confrontation in favor of sudden, deadly attacks that leave an opponent without the chance to make an effective counterattack.

Key Mechanics: Ambuscade, Fighting Style, Skirmisher's Stealth. These mechanics give the ranger a fighter feel, while focusing on specific tactics that involve ambushes, mobility, and sniping.

Wanderers

Rangers are the ultimate survivors. They can wander a barren wilderness alone for months, living only on what they find. A group with a ranger has a significantly easier time surviving in the wilds.

Key Mechanics: Natural Explorer, 2d6 Hit Dice. The Natural Explorer mechanic from the *Player's Handbook* makes the ranger the best character to have along on wilderness adventures. Upgraded Hit Dice make rangers as durable as barbarians, even as they gain a more reliable number of hit points compared to the barbarian's d12. In addition, having a higher total number of Hit Dice means a ranger can more efficiently heal with short rests, providing finer control over how much healing to shoot for when spending Hit Dice.

Guardians

Rangers are champions of the natural world. They are typically good aligned, and their link to nature gives them supernatural abilities. They are the paladins of the forest.

Key Mechanics: Spirit Path. The Spirit Path class feature combines the concept of an animal companion with the ranger's traditional spellcasting. This ranger has a spirit companion that can channel magical effects to the character and his or her companions. The spirit companion can manifest as a wild animal and aid the ranger for short periods of time—enough to make a big impact on one fight without serving as the star for every fight.

Companions are tricky to balance in D&D. If they are weak, they feel like a lot of work for a small payoff. However, even a moderately powerful companion can give a character too much of an advantage in the long term. This design opts for a very powerful companion, but one that appears only once per day.

This Playtest and the *Player's Handbook*

Does this playtest mean we're changing the ranger as presented in the *Player's Handbook*? No. Not in the least. This is merely an attempt to gauge how much interest there is in moving back to the core definition of the ranger, then attempting to shift it a bit to make it a more distinct class. Even if this option proves overwhelmingly popular, we'll continue to treat the ranger in the *Player's Handbook* as the canonical class and will keep this version as an option for players and DMs who want something a bit different. If you're happy with your current ranger character, keep playing!

Before we consider making a change to the *Player's Handbook*, an alternative ranger would need to be thoroughly playtested from levels 1 to 20. We would then need to see conclusive feedback that you—our players and DMs—want to replace the ranger character class. Even then, we'd simply make this option a legal choice for D&D Adventurers League play and present it in an upcoming expansion as a new option for home campaigns. We have no intention of invalidating current characters or taking options away from people who enjoy them.

Class Features

As a ranger, you gain the following class features.

Hit Points

Hit Dice: 2d6 per ranger level

Hit Points at 1st Level: 12 + your Constitution modifier

Hit Points at Higher Levels: 2d6 (or 7) + your Constitution modifier per ranger level after 1st

Proficiencies

Armor: Light armor, shields

Weapons: Simple weapons, martial weapons

Tools: Herbalism kit

Saving Throws: Dexterity, Wisdom

Skills: Choose three from Animal Handling, Athletics, Insight, Investigation, Nature, Perception, Stealth, and Survival

Equipment

You start with the following equipment, in addition to the equipment granted by your background.

- Leather armor
- (a) two shortswords or (b) two martial melee weapons or (c) a martial weapon and a shield
- (a) a dungeoneer's pack or (b) an explorer's pack
- (a) a longbow and a quiver of 20 arrows or (b) a martial weapon

The Ranger

Level	Proficiency	
	Bonus	Features
1st	+2	Ambuscade, Natural Explorer
2nd	+2	Fighting Style, Skirmisher's Stealth
3rd	+2	Primeval Awareness, Spirit Path
4th	+2	Ability Score Improvement
5th	+3	Extra Attack

Ambuscade

Rangers strike first and strike hard. When you roll initiative, you gain a special turn that takes place before other creatures can act. On this turn, you can use your action to take either the Attack or Hide action.

If more than one creature in an encounter has this feature, they all act first in order of initiative, then the regular initiative order begins.

If you would normally be surprised at the start of an encounter, you are not surprised but you do not gain this extra turn.

Natural Explorer

See the ranger class feature in the *Player's Handbook*.

Fighting Style

See the ranger class feature in the *Player's Handbook*.

Skirmisher's Stealth

Beginning at 2nd level, you combine speed and stealth in combat to make yourself hard to pin down. You are difficult to detect even if you attack or otherwise take actions that would normally reveal your presence.

At the start of your turn, pick a creature you are hidden from. You remain hidden from that creature during your turn, regardless of your actions or the actions of other creatures. As a bonus action at the end of your turn, you can make a Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide again if you fulfill the conditions needed to hide. Otherwise, creatures are aware of you at the end of your turn.

Primeval Awareness

See the class feature in the *Player's Handbook*.

Spirit Path

At 3rd level, you form a bond with a nature spirit—a companion forged by your link to the wild. This spirit companion protects you as you travel and watches your back in battle. You choose a ranger path that shapes your spirit companion and its magic: the Guardian, the Seeker, or the Stalker. Your choice grants you features at 3rd level and again at 7th, 11th, and 15th level.

Spirit Companion

All rangers gain a spirit companion and the ability to invoke its magical power. (Your spirit companion grants you one benefit you can call on in this playtest version of the revised ranger, with more benefits gained at higher levels.) You regain your ability to call on your spirit companion in this way when you finish a short or long rest.

Once per day as a bonus action, you can command your spirit companion to materialize as a living creature, determined by the ranger path you choose. Your spirit companion manifests as an animal for 1 minute or until your concentration is broken (as if you are concentrating on a spell). You can also dismiss it as a bonus action.

The manifested creature gains a bonus to attack rolls and saving throws equal to your Wisdom modifier. It uses the hit points in the animal's stat block or half your hit point maximum, whichever is higher.

The manifested creature takes its turn on your initiative and acts immediately after you. You control its actions, even if you are unconscious or otherwise unable to act.

Ability Score Improvement

See the class feature in the *Player's Handbook*.

Extra Attack

See the class feature in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ranger Paths

Your supernatural connection to nature and the wild takes you along one of three different ranger paths: the Guardian, the Seeker, or the Stalker.

Guardian

By following the path of the Guardian, you protect the natural world from creatures that would despoil it, even as you engage with the common folk who rely upon nature's bounty to survive. You patrol the pathways through the wilds, keeping them clear of bandits and

rampaging monsters, even as you keep careful watch on how civilized realms interact with the wilderness. Those who take more than their fair share—clear-cutting forests or hunting for sport rather than survival—risk your wrath.

When your spirit companion manifests, it takes the form of a brown bear.

Guardian's Shroud

Your companion spirit helps to protect you and the creatures closest to you. As a bonus action, you invoke your spirit companion and choose yourself or an ally you can see. The chosen creature gains temporary hit points equal to 2d6 + your Wisdom modifier.

Seeker

By taking up the Seeker path, you are drawn into the unknown wilds far from civilization in search of lost treasures, forgotten evil, and sites of primal magic. You understand that the trackless wilderness can harbor many secrets. Some of those secrets—such as a lonely oasis providing water to a desert realm—must be protected. Others—such as an ancient idol infused with the foul magic of the demon worshippers who crafted it—must be destroyed before their evil awakens once more.

When your spirit companion manifests, it takes the form of a giant eagle.

Seeker's Eye

Your companion spirit lends its sharp combat senses to you and your companions. As a bonus action, you invoke your spirit companion and choose a creature you can see. Until the end of your next turn, all attacks made against the chosen creature have advantage.

Stalker

As a ranger of the Stalker path, you prowl the wilderness in search of aberrations, fiends, and other monsters that must be slain before they wreak havoc on the natural world. You are the power of nature's vengeance made manifest, and anything that poses a threat to nature is your target. When a powerful creature such as a

dragon threatens a region, a ranger of the Stalker path leads the hunt that will take it down. Like others of your kind, you do not rest until your quarry is dead and the natural world is safe.

When your spirit companion manifests, it takes the form of a dire wolf.

Stalker's Fangs

Your companion spirit lends the strength of its deadly bite to you or one of your companions. As a bonus action, you invoke your spirit companion and choose yourself or a creature you can see. The next time the chosen creature hits with a weapon attack, the target of the attack takes extra slashing damage equal to 2d6 + your Wisdom modifier.