

Is Zangoose Good in Pokemon Scarlet and Violet?

Pokemon Scarlet and Violet has reintroduced many old Pokémon to Generation 9 that were absent from Generation 8's Sword and Shield games for the Nintendo Switch. While a few of them made appearances in Brilliant Diamond, Shining Pearl, and Legends Arceus, these will be their first appearance since Generation 7's Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon in mainline competitive play. One of these Pokemon raring for a fight is the Cat Ferret Pokemon, Zangoose.

Zangoose has always been a fan-favorite Pokémon, mostly because of its cool design and high Attack and Speed stats. While it's a fully evolved Pokemon as is, Zangoose needs no evolution, as it's strong and cool enough as it already is. As a Normal-type Pokemon, Zangoose only has a weakness to Fighting-type moves and an immunity to Ghost-type moves. Also, while it's somewhat frail with 60 Defense and Special Defense, and just 73 base HP, it's fast enough (90 base Speed) and hits hard enough (115 base Physical Attack) to overcome these shortcomings.

As a Pokemon that's been around since Generation 3's Ruby and Sapphire games for the Game Boy Advance, Zangoose is a Pokemon with a long history to unpack. The original story behind our bad-ass cat and ferret fusion monster is that it has a long-standing rivalry with Seviper. Every single Pokedex entry from Ruby and Sapphire through X and Y mentioned this rivalry. Interestingly, Zangoose didn't enjoy a Pokedex entry in Sun and Moon despite being able to exist within them when transferred over from Generation 6 games with Pokemon Bank.

The story of Zangoose is that [every cell of Zangoose's body](#) is etched with memories of battling its arch-rival Seviper. I'm not sure how that would actually work with real genetics, but we'll let that pass. Anyway, the Pokedex claims that Zangoose "adroitly dodges attacks with incredible agility." Considering its above average Speed, this makes total sense. Also, the fact about its sharp foreleg claws being its best weapon is repeated often. That's about the depth of the in-game lore of Zangoose, but it fits the ludonarrative perfectly.

Zangoose enjoys two abilities. The first and only ability that Zangoose naturally has is Immunity, meaning that it can't ever be poisoned. This is obviously a very helpful development in its feud with Seviper. Now, during the Black and White era when Hidden Abilities debuted, Zangoose gained another ability called Toxic Boost. This means that Zangoose now can actually be poisoned, but whenever it is, its attack is boosted by 50 percent. Naturally, this is the more relevant competitive ability, as you can just give Zangoose a Toxic Orb to guarantee its poisoned status.

Thanks to Smogon University, we can trace [the competitive history of Zangoose](#) through Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon. In its debut generation, it wasn't quite top-tier, but it was definitely good. Zangoose was one of the fastest Swords Dance-boosted sweepers and sporting the mighty Normal-type physical attack Return as its primary offensive weapon. It alternatively could run a Counter/Taunt set, or a Substitute/Endure/Flail set. All three were fairly effective, yet Zangoose still found itself competitively underused. But, once it dropped into Smogon's Underused (UU) tier, it was much too strong there, and had to be banned from every tier below the highest tier of OU (Overused.) It then remained in that UUBL purgatory until Generation 4.

In Diamond and Pearl, power creep turned Zangoose into a mid-tier competitive Pokemon, where it eventually settled in the NU (Never Used) tier on Smogon University. While he dove right into UU, he found himself outclassed, so had to settle for the next tier down. He still was a formidable mid-tier Swords Dance sweeper, and he gained the Fighting-type smasher Close Combat to his movepool in Gen 4. A Jolly nature Zangoose with a held Life Orb could do plenty of smashing. Zangoose wasn't quite a top-tier threat anymore, but he could surprise people with his pure power.

In Black and White, Zangoose was power crept down into the RU tier, the low-to-mid tier below NU. However, with the Dream World came Hidden Abilities, and with Toxic Boost and a Toxic Orb in hand, Jolly-nature Zangoose was suddenly an NU sweeper once again. Thanks to Toxic Boost, Facade was now a better Normal-type move for Zangoose, thanks to Facade's power being doubled if the user is afflicted by a status condition. It also began to use Night Slash more to punish Ghost-types. Even Quick Attack could now one-hit KO certain foes after a Swords Dance boost.

Zangoose continued to hold its own in X and Y NU and later Alpha Sapphire and Omega Ruby NU, as well. The only key difference in Zangoose's moveset was its swapping Night Slash for the newly boosted Knock Off, which deprives the opponent of its held item. But, in Sun and Moon, the massive power creep introduced by new Pokemon, as well as Z-Moves, ended up knocking Zangoose all the way to the lowest tier of PU. While Zangoose could still be a decent wall-breaker, many competitive players decided to switch from the tried and true Toxic Boost/Facade set to a Belly Drum set with the Immunity ability.

[The Belly Drum build of Zangoose](#) found itself at home on Sticky Web teams facilitated by Shuckle and Smeargle. But, the Toxic Boost set still saw play, albeit with many players opting to run Protect so it got a chance to get in a hit with a Toxic Orb activated Toxic Boost before its own frailty would lead it to be knocked out. Fortunately for Zangoose, it wouldn't have to contend with an even more power crept Generation 8 with Dynamax and Legendary nonsense taking over competitive play, especially in doubles.

While absent from Sword and Shield, Zangoose debuted in Generation 8's Diamond and Pearl remakes, Brilliant Diamond and Shining Pearl. It even got a new Pokedex entry. Plenty of trainers were raring to use Zangoose in competitive BDSP, but unfortunately, it's a format limited to a small niche of Pokemon Showdown players and content creators bent on making BDSP 6-on-6 singles a competitive format.

But, thanks to Pikalytics, we do have some usage stats for Zangoose in Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl OU on Pokemon Showdown. Zangoose has a very poor usage rate (0.06% as of 9/24/22), but it does show up. Its primary moveset is Close Combat, Shadow Claw, Facade, and Quick Attack, obviously a Toxic Boost set. Its common teammates in BDSP are Pachirisu, Clefable, Azumarill, Pelipper, and Nidoking.

Although Zangoose can be acquired easily in Brilliant Diamond's [Grand Underground](#), to unlock its Hidden Ability, you have to slave through the game's brutal Battle Tower for an Ability Patch to unlock it. This isn't the case in Generation 9 thanks to ability patches being easy to acquire. Sadly, our lovely Cat Ferret friend is absent from the competitive VGC scene. But, it's good to see Zangoose return to the Pokedex!

Zangoose and Seviper renew their ancient rivalry in Generation 9 with Scarlet and Violet, but how good will our Cat Ferret friend prove to be in the Paldea region? There are a couple things working in

Zangoose's favor: no more Dynamax and no more Z-Moves. With the Pokedex expanding even further in Gen 9, though, I can't see Zangoose being much better than a low-tier sweeper.

In casual playthroughs, though, Zangoose can be a monster, especially if you manage to get one with Toxic Boost somehow. Even with Immunity, Zangoose is plenty strong with a Life Orb, of course. When you run Swords Dance, Facade, Knock Off, and Quick Attack or Close Combat, you have a Pokemon that hits decently hard; Facade is particularly deadly with the Toxic Orb. Without a Life Orb or Toxic Boost, though, Zangoose is simply not going to play up to the natural power creep of the past two generations. All that being said, I'm glad Zangoose is in Scarlet and Violet. And according to Smogon, [Zangoose is playable in the ZU \(Zero-Used\) format of single battles](#). Perhaps we will see Zangoose see at least some play in Pokemon Champions.

~ *Amelia Desertsong*