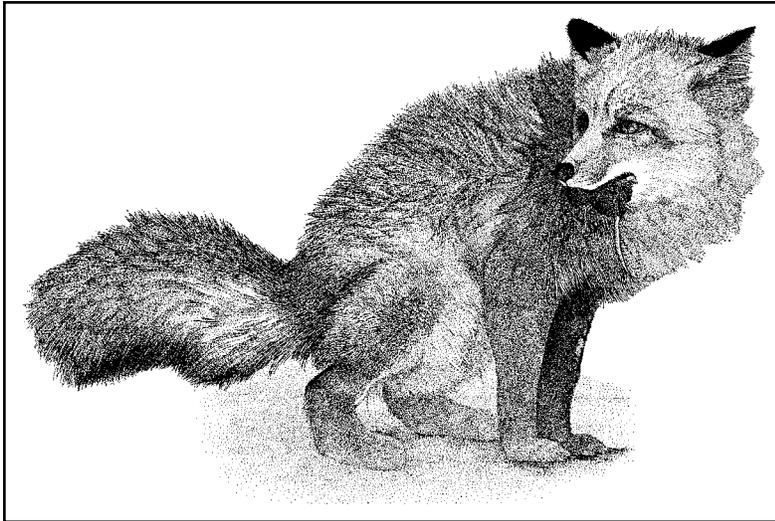
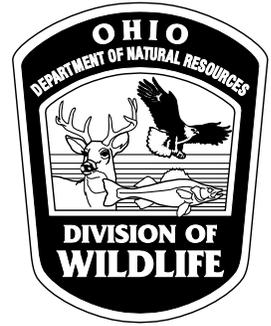


Ohio Division of Wildlife
Life History Notes
Red Fox

Scientific Name: *Vulpes vulpes*



Publication 91
(1099)

Introduction

The red fox is one of two fox species in Ohio and one of four in North America. The state's other fox is the gray fox. The Arctic and swift foxes are the other species found in North America. North American foxes inhabit a wide range of habitats from deserts to forests to snow-covered tundras. This isn't completely surprising as the red and other foxes are members of the same family of adaptable animals that includes the wolves, coyote, and domestic dog--Canidae.

The red fox inhabits almost all of the United States and Canada. There are only a few areas where this species isn't found in the two countries: the West Coast, southwest Oklahoma and northwest Texas in the states and small portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada.

Description

The red fox is likely the one that comes to mind when you think of a fox. Although it can have several color variations, the red fox takes its name from its most common color phase: a rusty-red or reddish yellow coat from its face down its back and sides. Its undersides, throat area, and cheeks are white. The legs, feet, and outside of the ears are black; its long, bushy tail has black hairs mixed with the red and ends in a white tip. This feature can be used to help identify it; the gray fox's tail has a black tip. The tail of the red fox is usually between 14 and 16 inches long.

The red fox may appear in two other color phases. Variations in color include solid black and silver. In all of its color phases, however, the red fox's tail is white-tipped.

The red fox is similar in appearance to a dog, with a slender body, long legs, and a long pointed muzzle.

Habitat and Habits

The red fox likely arrived in Ohio in the mid-1700s. Prior to that time, its range extended to just north of Ohio. But as Ohio was settled and forests were opened and farmlands established the red fox began to inhabit the state. The red fox prefers a mixture of forest and open country. Farmland with woodlots and brushy areas near marshes and swamps are ideal for this species. But the red fox isn't limited to residence and activity in such areas. The species is adaptable and can be found in many other habitat types, including the suburbs.

Red foxes are solitary creatures during the fall and early winter. Their range is one to two miles, but if food supplies dwindle within this area, the animals will extend their normal range to search for food. These foxes do not hibernate; under extreme winter weather conditions they will reduce activity levels and take shelter for a day or two.

The red fox has a distinct call, not like those of its cousins the wolf, coyote, or dog; males yelp and females yap.

Red foxes are nocturnal creatures, meaning that they are most active at night, feeding and moving from place to place. Nonetheless they are often found hunting during daylight hours.

The red fox is known for its speed, excellent senses of sight, smell, and hearing, and exceptional use of cover when pursued.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

The red fox's solitary wandering comes to a close in Ohio as early as December, but typically in January or February when courtship and mating rituals begin. A male will seek an unmated female and form a pair bond. Females then seek out an abandoned groundhog burrow as a den for her kits. Both the male and female will work on expanding this site that is later lined with grasses. Females that need to dig their own dens from scratch usually do so by selecting an area of loose, sandy soil with a southern exposure. A natural rock shelter may also be used. It is not unusual for the foxes to have a reserve den prepared nearby or for several families to share a den. Most fox dens are about four feet below ground.

Female red foxes carry their young for nearly two months (51-53 days); as such most kits in Ohio are born in March or April. Litters typically are made up of five or six kits. While the female is below ground nursing her offspring, the male will bring her food. He continues in this role until the young are weaned and can go with their parents on hunting trips where they learn a basic survival skill. By fall of the same year, the family unit breaks up; the young are mature enough to go on their own and their parents split and live independently until the start of the next breeding season. Red foxes are monogamous during the reproductive and pup-rearing stages. It is unclear as to whether or not the same male and female will reunite in following years.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for the red fox. However, the red fox can be found on many of our state wildlife areas where suitable habitat exists. The habitat management activities that occur on these areas and elsewhere around the state are designed to benefit the red fox and a host of other wildlife species. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate data and establish hunting and trapping season dates and bag limits for taking the red fox.



Hind Foot Track

Viewing Opportunities

Red foxes are found in all 88 counties of Ohio. The best chances of seeing them are in rural areas where open space is interspersed with woods. Four of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good places to catch a glimpse of the elusive red fox: Blacklick Woods Metro Park, Delaware State Wildlife Area, Fowler Woods State Nature Preserve, and Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

Do Something Wild!

The Ohio Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species like the red fox are hunted in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research non-game species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.



Fore Foot Track



At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous

Peak Breeding Activity: January-February

Gestation: 51-53 days

Young are Born: February-April

Litter Size: 5 or 6 kits

Young Leave Parents: In the fall, about 6-8 months after birth

Number of Litters per Year: 1

Adult Weight: 8-15 pounds

Adult Length: 22-25 inches

Life Expectancy: 6-8 years; oldest known 12 years

Migration Pattern: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Mice, rats, rabbits, groundhogs, and other small mammals; also birds, fruits, and some grasses.

Native to Ohio: No, arrived following European settlement

