

Natural. Valued. Protected.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Fall 2009

Life Cycle:

Red foxes live an average of three to four years in the wild, but may live as long as 12 years. They breed once a year in monogamous pairs. Breeding usually occurs between January and March and females give birth 51 to 53 days later. The average litter contains six kits, but can range from one to ten in size. The male stays with the family and helps raise the young. The young stay with both parents until the fall when they disperse.

Description:

Red foxes have reddish fur with a white throat and chest. The tail has a white tip. The belly is usually grayish-white. Foxes are 60-90 centimetres long (excluding the tail) and weigh from 2-7 kilograms.

Hibernation:

Red foxes do not hibernate and are active year-round.

Habitat:

Red foxes are found in all habitats in Ontario. A pair of foxes will occupy a territory of three to eight square kilometres, which they will defend from other foxes. Territory boundaries are marked with scent and urine. Foxes will select den sites near human areas and are commonly found in many large urban centers in Ontario.

Diet:

Red foxes are omnivores, eating both plant and animal material, but they prefer animal matter such as small rodents, frogs, insects, birds and snakes. Preferred plant foods include acorns, grasses, corn, fruits and berries.

Behaviour:

Red foxes are solitary and hunt alone except during breeding season. Males are only territorial during breeding season. The young accompany the parents while hunting and foraging to learn skills.

There is antagonism between coyotes and foxes. Coyotes may drive foxes out of their range where ranges overlap. A fox will bark if a coyote approaches a den and coyotes often chase foxes but rarely catch them since foxes can reach speeds up to 48 kilometres per hour.

The great alertness of the red fox and its keen sense of smell, hearing and sight enable it to live close to humans without being easily noticed. An urban fox does not have the same fear of humans as a rural fox but, an adult fox will generally respect the presence of a human and retreat when approached. It is not normal for an adult fox to approach dogs or humans. It is also unusual for foxes to try to enter doghouses, garages or houses. People should never feed foxes because they will quickly adapt to human food and may become a nuisance.

It is normal to see a fox during daylight hours and see them sunning themselves. Females may look like they have a scruffy coat during spring and summer while they are nursing their young. That's because they pulled out their own fur to make nests.

Predators:

Normal predators include man, wolves, coyotes, dogs, hawks and owls.

Diseases:

In North America, red foxes are carriers of three common wildlife diseases: rabies, distemper and mange. Animals with these diseases can exhibit symptoms such as staggering, disorientation, paralysis of hind limbs, and loss of fear of humans. They may also look thin, have poor coat condition and make frenzied attacks on objects.

Rabies and distemper are both viral diseases. Rabies can be transmitted to non-immunized humans, livestock and pets, usually by exposure to saliva of an infected animal. Distemper is a major viral disease of foxes but cannot be transmitted to humans or immunized pets. Distemper is transmitted through contact with the excretions or secretions of infected animals. Mange is the most common disease of foxes across North America, and causes significant mortality within their populations. Mange is caused by a mite and can be transmitted to humans and pets. Symptoms include an itching red rash.

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Ontario.ca/rabies