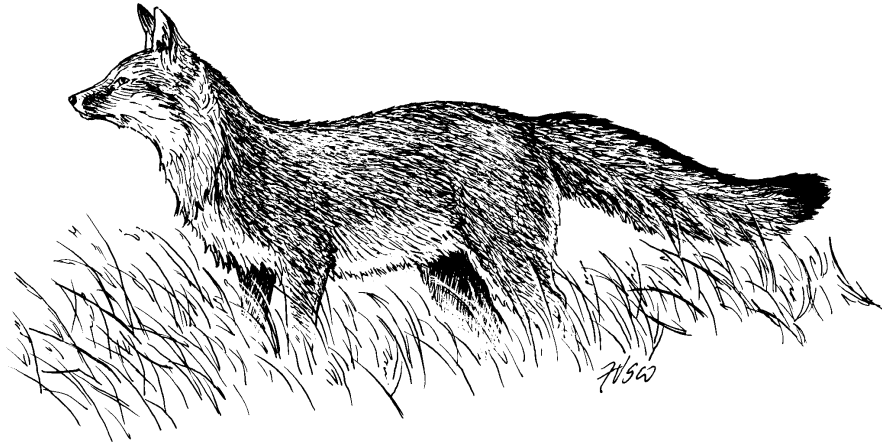


WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

INFORMATIONAL SERIES

GRAY FOX

Urocyon cinereoargenteus



Habitat: Deciduous woodlands, thickets and swampy areas.

Weight: Ranges from 7 to 14 pounds, 10 to 11 pounds is average.

Length: 32 to 45 inches. Sexes about equal in size.

Food: Rabbits, mice, voles, rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, fruits, insects, birds and eggs, carrion, corn, amphibians and reptiles.

Identification: Foxes have pointed ears, an elongated snout (shorter and more cat-like in appearance in the gray fox than the red fox) and a long, bushy tail which is carried horizontally. The gray fox is somewhat stout and has shorter legs than the red fox. Its coat is mostly grizzled-gray. The sides of the neck, back of the ears, a band across the chest, the inner and back surfaces of the legs, the feet, the sides of the belly and the under surface of the tail are all reddish-brown. The cheeks, throat, inner ears and most of the underside are white. The upper part of the tail, including the tip, is black.

Range: The gray fox occurs from extreme southern Canada throughout the United States, except in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and most of Washington. It ranges into Mexico and Central America.

Reproduction: Foxes breed from January through March with the gray fox tending to breed two to four weeks later than the red fox. After an average gestation period of 53 days, the female fox gives birth to a litter averaging four or five pups. The gray fox usually does not use an underground den but, instead, dens in dense brush, cavities in stumps and trees, rock crevices or

under out-buildings such as barns and sheds. Most foxes have more than one den and will readily move their young if disturbed. The pups stay in the den until about four to five weeks of age, after which they emerge and begin to play outside the den entrance. Both adults care for the young by bringing food and guarding the den site. At about 12 weeks of age, the pups are weaned and join the adults on hunting forays, learning to catch food for themselves. In the fall, the young disperse from the family unit and will usually breed the first spring after they are born.

History in Connecticut: In the middle 1700s, Connecticut was home to both native gray and red foxes. The red fox was an inhabitant of mixed forest and open areas while the gray fox inhabited more dense woodlands. In the 1750s, the European red fox was introduced into the eastern coastal areas of the United States and likely interbred with the native red fox to produce a hybrid (mix) of both types of fox. The hybrid fox is now considered to be the only red fox type in Connecticut. With the abandonment of farmland during the 1800s and subse-

quent regrowth of woodlands, the gray fox population has increased during the past 100 years.

Interesting Facts: Gray foxes are not observed as frequently as red foxes due to their reclusive nature and more nocturnal habits. Gray foxes tend to be active from the late evening hours until dawn. They will readily climb trees, jumping from branch to branch while hunting or for protection.

In Connecticut, the normal home range for a fox is about two to four square miles, but it may vary depending on the abundance of food.

The gray fox has a voice similar to the red fox, but barks or yaps less often than the red fox and its voice is louder.

Hunting and trapping can regulate fox populations while providing recreational opportunities for hunters and trappers. Nationally, millions of dollars are generated annually from fox pelt harvests; the silky, dense fur of the red fox is more valued than the fur of the gray fox, which is coarse and thin. In addition to their value as a furbearer, foxes are important predators of prolific prey species like mice and rabbits.

Adult foxes have few predators; feral dogs and coyotes likely will not tolerate foxes within their territories. The relationship between gray foxes and coyotes has not been well studied.

Management of Problem Foxes: Problems associated with foxes include depredation on domestic animals, perceptions of danger to humans (healthy foxes pose virtually no danger to humans) and their potential to carry disease organisms. Foxes will prey on small livestock such as ducks, chickens, rabbits and young lambs, but generally do not bother larger livestock. Cats may also be preyed on. Foxes often carry their prey to a secluded area or their den where it is eaten by the adults and young.

Livestock can be protected from foxes by secure pens, coops or fencing. Most predation occurs at night so it is particularly important to provide protection at that time.

Foxes will dig or squeeze under poorly maintained fences and may climb over small fences. Some electric fence designs can provide good protection. Outdoor dogs may also keep foxes away. Potential food sources, such as pet food, meat scraps in compost piles, and fruit below fruit trees should be eliminated. Dead livestock should be properly discarded to avoid attracting foxes into the proximity of remaining livestock. Removing foxes through trapping or shooting is only recommended during designated seasons or in situations where individual foxes show a pattern of preying on livestock.

Many of the methods used to protect livestock can also be used to protect pets. Pets are often easier to protect because they can be kept indoors at night and can be supervised outdoors by their owners. Human presence is often a deterrent to foxes. Foxes that travel into residential yards should be harassed or scared with loud noises to prevent them from becoming habituated. During the spring, disturbing a den site physically or with unnatural odors such as moth balls, may prompt foxes to move to an alternative den which may be farther from yards and houses.

Foxes can carry the organisms responsible for several contagious diseases such as mange, distemper (gray foxes being highly susceptible) and rabies. The raccoon rabies strain is the only terrestrial strain of rabies in Connecticut. Raccoons are the primary carrier but foxes can also be infected. Foxes are the primary carrier for other strains of rabies that occur in other geographic regions. Animals that appear sick or that are acting abnormally should be avoided. The following symptoms may indicate the presence of rabies or other neurological diseases in mammals: unprovoked aggression, impaired movement, paralysis or lack of coordination, unusually friendly behavior and disorientation. Local animal control officers, police, or the Department of Environmental Protection should be contacted if assistance is needed with a diseased animal.



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