

Ohio Division of Wildlife
Life History Notes
Gray Fox

Scientific Name: *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*



Publication 112
(1099)

Introduction

The gray fox is one of two fox species in Ohio and one of four in North America. The state's other fox is the red 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 gray and other foxes are members of the same family of adaptable animals that includes the wolves, coyote, and domestic dog--Canidae.

The gray fox inhabits about three-fourths of the United States and only a tiny portion of southernmost Manitoba, Canada. It is not found in the high plains, northern Rockies or the Pacific Northwest. Its range does, however, extend into Mexico and Central and South America. In Ohio, it's found in all 88 counties, but is much more common in southeastern Ohio where woodlands, its preferred habitat are more extensive.

Description

The gray fox's coat color is a salt and pepper gray. A black stripe runs from the base of the tail and ends in a black tip. Another black stripe crosses its face from the nose to the eye and then to the side of the head. Like the red fox its cheek and throat area are white and this color extends on the gray fox to the lower jaw. There is a reddish patch on the side of its head below its ear. Its belly is white and a reddish

band separates it from the gray sides. The legs and back of the ears are an orange color while the feet are gray.

The gray foxes' body is similar to a red fox with a slender body and long legs, but its ears and muzzle are not as large or pointed respectively.

Habitat and Habits

The gray fox is native to Ohio. The extensive forest land that existed prior to settlement was well suited to the gray fox. As the state was settled and cleared, gray fox habitat declined and red fox habitat expanded. Wooded areas and partially open brush land with little human presence are the preferred habitat for gray foxes in Ohio.

Gray foxes do not hibernate; under extreme winter weather conditions they will reduce activity levels and take shelter for a day or two.

The gray fox has a distinct bark that is usually repeated four or five times in a row. It will also squeal or growl.

Gray foxes are nocturnal creatures, meaning that they are most active at night, feeding and moving from place to place. When pressured it will climb a tree or emit an odor from its anal glands. The gray fox will also climb a tree to sun itself.



Reproduction and Care of the Young

Gray foxes generally begin reproduction activities later than red foxes. In Ohio, mating activities occur about a month after those of the red fox, in February and March, but sometimes as early as January. Gray foxes are monogamous meaning that the male mates with only one female and that those two form a pair bond, working together to care for their offspring. A gray fox female will make a den in a hollow log or tree, or under a rock pile for her kits. Less often, a leaf and bark-lined underground burrow is used.

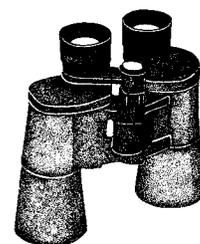
Female gray foxes carry their young for nearly two months (53 days); as such, most gray fox kits are born in April or May. Litters typically are made up of four or five kits. While the female is nursing her offspring, the male will bring her food. He continues in this role until the young are about three months old and can go with their parents on hunting trips where they learn a basic survival skill. Gray foxes have a reputation as excellent mousers. By fall of the same year, the family unit breaks up; the young are mature enough to go out on their own. Young gray foxes disperse anywhere from one to ten miles from their home den to establish their own home ranges or territories.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for the gray fox. However, the gray 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 gray 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 the gray fox.

Viewing Opportunities

Gray foxes are found in all 88 counties of Ohio. The best chances of seeing them are in rural areas where there is extensive woodlands. Four of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good places to catch a glimpse of the elusive gray fox: Blacklick Woods Metro Park, Delaware State Wildlife Area, Fowler Woods State Nature Preserve, and Shawnee State Forest.



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 gray 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.

At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous

Peak Breeding Activity: February-March

Gestation: 53 days

Young are Born: April-May

Litter Size: 4 or 5 kits

Young Leave Parents: In the fall, about 5-7 months after birth

Number of Litters per Year: 1

Adult Weight: 5-14 pounds

Adult Length: 21-29 inches

Life Expectancy: 6-8 years, oldest known 10 years

Migration Pattern: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Mice, rats, rabbits, and other small mammals; also birds, insects, eggs, fruits, and acorns.

Native to Ohio: Yes

