

= Swift fox =

The swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) is a small light orange @-@ tan fox around the size of a domestic cat found in the western grasslands of North America , such as Montana , Colorado , New Mexico , Oklahoma and Texas . It also lives in Manitoba , Saskatchewan and Alberta in Canada , where it was previously extirpated . It is closely related to the kit fox and the two species are sometimes known as subspecies of *Vulpes velox* because hybrids of the two species occur naturally where their ranges overlap .

The swift fox lives primarily in short @-@ grass prairies and deserts . It became nearly extinct in the 1930s as a result of predator control programs , but was successfully reintroduced later . Currently , the conservation status of the species is considered by the IUCN as Least Concern owing to stable populations elsewhere .

Like most canids , the swift fox is an omnivore , and its diet includes grasses and fruits as well as small mammals , carrion , and insects . In the wild , its lifespan is three to six years , and it breeds once annually , from late December to March , depending on the geographic region . Pups are born anywhere from March to mid @-@ May , and are weaned at six to seven weeks old .

The swift fox is closely related genetically to the kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*) , but occupies a different geographical range . The two have historically been regarded as different species for reasons basically related to size : the kit fox is slightly smaller than the swift fox , and the former has a narrower snout . However , hybrids between the two occur naturally where their ranges overlap , and some mammalogists classify the two as subspecies of a single species , usually treated as *Vulpes velox* (with the swift fox being described as *V. velox velox* and the kit fox as *V. velox macrotis*) . The molecular genetics evidence is not conclusive however , and some of those who have used it continue to treat the swift fox and kit fox as separate species .

= = Description = =

The swift fox has a dark , grayish , tan coloration that extends to a yellowish tan color across its sides and legs . The throat , chest , and belly range from pale yellow to white in color . Its tail is black @-@ tipped , and it has black patches on its muzzle . Its ears are noticeably large . It is about 12 inches (30 cm) in height , and 31 inches (79 cm) long , measuring from the head to the tip of the tail , or about the size of a domestic cat . Its weight ranges from around five to seven pounds . Males and females are similar in appearance , although males are slightly larger .

= = Habitat and distribution = =

The swift fox resides primarily in deserts and short @-@ grass prairies . They form their dens in sandy soil on open prairies , in plowed fields , or along fences . It is native to the Great Plains region of North America , and its range extends north to the central part of Alberta , Canada , and south to Texas . It reaches from western Iowa to Colorado , Kansas , Wyoming , Nebraska , and Montana .

= = Conservation status = =

The swift fox was once a severely endangered species , due to predator control programs in the 1930s that were aimed mostly at the gray wolf and the coyote . The species was extirpated from Canada by 1938 , but a reintroduction program started in 1983 has been successful in establishing small populations in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan , despite the fact that many reintroduced individuals do not survive their first year . In May 1999 , the Species at Risk Act listed the swift fox as an endangered species in Canada .

Exact population numbers of the swift fox are unknown , but it is known that they currently inhabit only 40 % of their historic range . In addition to its populations in Canada , there are also swift fox populations in the United States , ranging from South Dakota to Texas . In 1995 , the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the fox warranted an endangered listing , but other higher priority

species precluded its listing . This prompted state wildlife agencies within the fox 's range to create the Swift Fox Conservation Team , which worked to implement better swift fox management and monitoring programs . Populations in the United States are stable in the central part of its range , and it is not considered endangered in the United States . The IUCN Red List characterizes it as of Least Concern .

= = Behavior = =

In the wild , the swift fox usually lives 3 ? 6 years , but may live up to 14 years in captivity . It is primarily nocturnal , spending only evenings and nighttime above ground in the summer . Daytime activities are usually confined to the den , but it has been known to spend the warm midday period above ground during the winter . The swift fox is more heavily dependent on its den than most North American canids , using them as shelter from predators . These dens are usually underground burrows that are two to four meters in length . It has been known to run very fast , at speeds of over 50 km / h (30 mph) . or up to 60 km / h (40 mph) The coyote is the swift fox 's main predator , but often chooses not to consume the swift fox . Other predators include the badger , golden eagle , and bobcat . It is also vulnerable to trapping and poisoning , as well as death on highways .

= = = Reproduction = = =

The adult swift fox 's breeding season varies with region . In the southern United States , it mates between December and February with pups born in March and early April , while in Canada , the breeding season begins in March , and pups are born in mid @-@ May . The male swift fox matures and may mate at one year , while the female usually waits until her second year before breeding . Adults live in pairs , and although some individuals mate for life , others choose different partners each year . Gestation takes around 51 days , and four to five kits are born .

The swift fox only has one litter annually , but may occupy up to thirteen dens in one year , moving because prey is scarce or because skin parasites build up inside the den . Sometimes it makes other burrows from other bigger animals , even though it is completely capable of digging one on its own . Pups are born in the den and typically remain there for approximately one month . A newborn pup 's eyes and ears remain closed for ten to fifteen days , leaving it dependent on the mother for food and protection during this time . It is usually weaned around six or seven weeks old and remains with its parents until fall . Recent research has shown that social organization in the swift fox is unusual among canids , since it is based on the females . Females maintain territories at all times , but males emigrate if the resident female is killed or removed .

= = = Diet = = =

Like most canids , the swift fox is an omnivore . Rabbits , mice , ground squirrels , birds , insects and lizards are staples . Grasses and fruits round out its diet . However , like any efficient forager , the swift fox takes advantage of seasonal foods . During the summer , adults eat large amounts of insects , including beetles and grasshoppers , and feed their young with larger prey items . Deer and other carrion killed by other animals may also be important food sources .