

Swift fox

Vulpes velox

Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Mammalia
Order	Carnivora
Family	Canidae



Native to: The Great Plains in North America.

Status: Least Concern

The Swift Fox was once a severely endangered species, predator control programs in the 1930s aimed at larger predators nearly wiped the Swift Fox out. The species was extirpated from Canada by 1938, but reintroduced in 1983. There are now small populations in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan. Although it is listed as least concern under the IUCN status, in May 1999, the Canadian Species at Risk Act listed the Swift Fox as an endangered species in Canada. It currently inhabits only 40% of its historic range.

Appearance & Lifespan

The Swift Fox is a grayish tan colour with yellowish tan across its sides and legs. The throat, chest, and belly are pale yellow or white. Its tail is black-tipped, and it has black patches on its muzzle. It has very large ears. When fully grown they reach about 12 inches (30 cm) in height, and 31 inches (79 cm) in length, 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.

The lifespan of the Swift Fox is three to six years in the wild but can be up to 14 years in captivity.





Behavior & Reproduction

The Swift Fox is mostly nocturnal meaning it prefers to come out at night, especially in the summer when it's hot out through the day. Daytime activities are usually confined to the den, but it will come out for a warm afternoon during the winter. The Swift Fox is very dependent on its den, using it as shelter from predators and for bearing young. These dens are usually underground burrows that are two to four meters in length.

The Swift Fox's breeding season is between December and March with the pups born in April and May. Adults live in pairs, and some individuals mate for life, others choose different partners each year. Gestation takes around 51 days, and four or five pups are born. Pups are born in the den and stay there for about a month. A newborn pup's eyes and ears are closed for ten to fifteen days. It is usually weaned around six or seven weeks old and remains with its parents until fall. The Swift Fox only has one litter per year, but may move around to more than ten different dens in one year. They move in search of food or because skin parasites build up inside the den. The females maintain the family's territory at all times, males will emigrate if the resident female is killed or removed.

Ecology & Habitat

The Swift Fox lives primarily in deserts and short-grass prairies. They dig 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.

The Swift Fox is an omnivore which means it likes to eat both meat and vegetation. Their main prey is rabbits, mice, ground squirrels, birds, insects and lizards. Grasses and fruits and insects are also eaten. They will also eat carrion left behind by others.

At the zoo the Swift fox eats horse meat, beef organs and bones, mice, and day old chicks.

Did You Know?

1. The Swift Fox has been known to run very fast, at speeds of over 50 km/h (30 mph).
2. The predators of the Swift Fox are coyote, badger, golden eagle, and bobcat.
3. Conversion of grasslands into agriculture is the number one threat to Swift Fox populations.

