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## WHAT TO DO IF YOU LIVE IN RED FOX COUNTRY

People and wildlife can coexist. Most dangerous encounters occur because people fail to leave wildlife alone. Red foxes are not pets, and they should not be approached, fed, harassed, captured or domesticated.

### REMOVE ATTRACTANTS

**GARBAGE:** Garbage that is not securely stored provides an easy meal for these scavengers. Store all garbage in wildlife-proof containers.

**FRUIT TREES:** Clean up any fallen fruit to avoid luring red foxes or other wildlife to your yard.

**COMPOSTING:** Use an enclosed composting system and avoid placing meat or fruit scraps onto your mulch or compost pile.

**PETS:** Red foxes will occasionally prey on small pets. Don't allow your pets to roam. Make sure your yard is properly fenced and, when possible, keep your pets indoors. Avoid feeding your pets outdoors and keep your pet on a leash when walking it.

### EXCLUSIONARY TECHNIQUES

Many nuisance red fox problems can be addressed by installing an exclusionary fence. These fences should be at least 6-feet high with an extra foot of fencing buried underground to prevent digging. Use small woven wire mesh and have a 12-inch wide overhanging edge or a roof to prevent climbing. Electric fencing is another exclusionary fencing option.

### DETERRENCE TECHNIQUES

**VISUAL DETERRENENTS:** The installation of bright strobe lights can be helpful. However, red foxes are highly adaptable and may not be deterred for long by this technique.

**NOISE DETERRENENTS:** Red foxes can be scared with loud noises, including shouting or banging pots and pans. However, foxes that are habituated to living in an urban environment can adapt to human-related noises.

**REPELLANTS:** Some companies manufacture repellents for deterring foxes. One noncommercial repellent is ammonia. Using repellants is most successful in small, isolated areas.

**TRAPS AND SNARES:** In most cases, the use of snares and other trapping devices is not legal in Colorado. In many places, live traps are legal and can be useful in urban areas. Individuals wishing to use live traps should be aware of local and state laws. Wildlife regulations prohibit the trapping and relocation of red foxes.

**SHOOTING:** Shooting nuisance red foxes is an effective control method on private land in rural areas. Landowners wishing to shoot red foxes need to be aware of local and state laws. The hunting of red foxes on public land requires a Colorado small-game or furbearers license.

### DISEASES

If a red fox acts aggressively, it may be an indication that it is sick or injured. Red foxes can carry a number of diseases; however, healthy foxes pose virtually no human health risk. The best way to prevent exposure to any wildlife diseases is to avoid approaching and handling wild animals. Pets should also be kept away from wildlife and should be vaccinated against rabies. Any red fox that appears to be sick or that is acting strangely or aggressively should be reported to the nearest DOW office and the local animal control agency.

**RABIES:** Rabies is a virus that attacks the central nervous system of mammals. The virus is shed in the saliva of an infected animal and is transmitted mainly through bites. A red fox with rabies may lose its natural wariness of people, become extremely aggressive, display lack of muscle coordination and/or show signs of paralysis. Although rabies has been detected in Colorado, cases are relatively rare.

**MANGE:** Sarcoptic mange is an infestation of the skin by mites, which causes hair loss and severe irritation of the skin. Serious cases can cause blindness, hearing loss, difficulty eating and sometimes even death to the fox. Mange is found in Colorado.

### DON'T FEED WILDLIFE

Feeding wildlife may be well intended, but it is harmful to the animal and can be dangerous for humans. In many parts of Colorado the intentional feeding of red foxes is also illegal and should be reported.

### DOW HEADQUARTERS

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### DOW SERVICE CENTERS

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Pueblo, CO 81005  
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(719) 530-5520

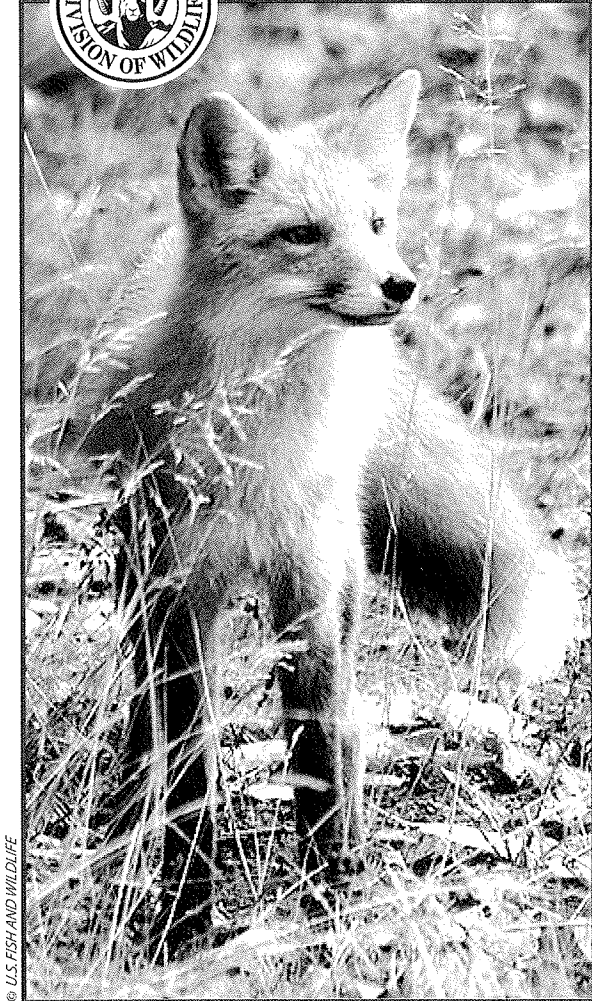
**STEAMBOAT SPRINGS:**  
925 Weiss Drive,  
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80477; (970) 870-2197

*The Colorado Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing wildlife and its habitat, as well as providing wildlife-related recreation.*

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COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

# Living with Wildlife in Red Fox Country



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## RED FOX AT A GLANCE

The red fox is a member of the canid family, which also includes wolves, coyotes and domestic dogs. They have a very keen sense of smell, excellent hearing and good vision. Red foxes can run at speeds of 30 miles per hour and are good swimmers.

In captivity, red foxes live roughly 12 years; however, three to four years is the average life expectancy for wild foxes. Adult red foxes have very few natural enemies. Predators include: coyotes, eagles, great-horned owls, bobcats and mountain lions. Hunting, motor vehicle fatalities and diseases such as rabies, mange and canine distemper also contribute to their mortality.

Red foxes are beautiful animals and can make for an enjoyable watchable wildlife experience.

### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

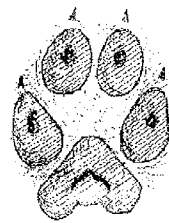
Red foxes are similar in appearance to a small, slender dog. Adults weigh 8-15 pounds and are roughly 3 to 4 feet long including the tail. They have an elongated

muzzle and pointed ears that are typically held erect.

Despite the name, red foxes are not always red. They have genetic variations resulting in four recognized color phases: red, cross, silver and black. The red color phase is the most commonly observed in wild red foxes, with all other phases being fairly rare. In all color phases, red foxes have a characteristic white-tipped tail.

### TELL-TALE SIGNS

Sightings are the most obvious way to know that foxes are in the area, but the presence of scat, tracks and hair are also good clues.



Red foxes have chevron-shaped heel pads that distinguish them from other canids and, unlike most other canine species, red foxes grow large amounts of fur between their toes. Occasionally their feet are covered with so much fur that individual toe

pads in tracks can be completely obscured.

Red foxes have a musk gland located near the base of their tail. This gland contributes to their strong musty urine odor, which can sometimes be detected in areas where fox activity is high.

### VOCALIZATIONS

Red foxes are very vocal, especially during the breeding season. The most commonly misinterpreted sounds produced by the red fox are screeching yowls that are often reported as a domestic cat fight or a mountain lion screaming. Barking and yipping are also common, especially if pups are present. Although foxes do howl, the sound is quite different from coyote and wolf howling.

### HABITAT

The red fox can be found in most habitats in Colorado. They are common in open woodlands, pasturelands, riparian areas and agricultural lands. Red foxes can also be successful urban dwellers and often do well on the margins of urbanized areas.

### BEHAVIOR

A typical home range for a red fox is 5 to 10 square miles, depending on food availability. Males tend to travel farther than females, but juveniles dispersing from their parents will often travel the farthest. Adult red foxes will typically stay within a mile of their den while they are raising pups.

Red foxes may be active any time, day or night, but are most active at dawn and dusk.

### HUNTING AND FEEDING HABITS

The red fox is an opportunistic omnivore and skilled predator and scavenger. They will kill and eat ground nesting birds and their eggs, as well as a wide variety of small mammals, insects, amphibians, fish, crawdads and earthworms. Fruits, berries, nuts, carrion and garbage are also part of their varied diets.

### MATING AND BREEDING

Sexual maturity is reached at approximately 10 months of age, and both males and females will breed as juveniles. In Colorado, most mating occurs in mid- to late winter, with most young born in early spring after a gestation period of 53 days.

Red foxes often have a number of den sites available for their use throughout the breeding and rearing seasons; however, a primary den, called a natal den is typically



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established in late winter. Natal den sites may be used year after year.

Although a red fox will excavate its own dens, they seem to prefer using dens that were constructed by other animals. Depressions under buildings are also favored den sites.

Throughout most of the year, red foxes are observed in pairs or in family groups. While it is believed red foxes mate for life, pairs may separate for a few months, rejoining during the breeding season.

### BIRTH TO MATURITY

Red foxes have a single annual litter. Litter size may vary, with litters in excess of 15 young documented. Most litters average 4 to 5 pups, also known as kits.

Pups weigh about three or four ounces at birth. They are born blind and helpless, but mature quickly. By the time they are 9 days old, their eyes are completely open. Weaning begins when the pups are 4 to 5 weeks old.

Kits will stay within the den for the first month of their lives. Red foxes may move their kits once or more throughout the early months of life, particularly if the existing den is disturbed. Once the kits reach 4 to 5 weeks of age, they will start emerging from the den, often playing near the den entrance.

When the kits are approximately 8 to 12 weeks old, they begin to accompany the adults on hunting forays. By the time the kits are 16 to 20 weeks old, they start fending for themselves. Typically kits will remain relatively close to the den for the first several weeks of independence, with most juveniles dispersing in the fall.