

Life History of the Gray Fox

LHOTGF022604

The gray fox is a member of the family Canidae, which includes the red fox and coyote. Densities of gray foxes range from 3-5 foxes per square mile.

DESCRIPTION: Weights of adult foxes in Alabama usually range from 7-11 pounds. They do not have a white tip on their tail like the red fox. The gray fox can escape predation from coyotes by climbing trees.



REPRODUCTION: Gray foxes are primarily monogamous, forming breeding pairs for the duration of their life span. Litter size ranges from 1-6 pups with an average of four pups per litter. Both parents care for the young. The breeding season runs from February until March and peak birthing times are from April to May. The gestation period lasts from 51 to 63 days; females have one litter per year.

HABITAT: Gray foxes prefer mature mixed pine-hardwood stands but will use clearcuts, young pine stands and edges of agricultural fields. Home ranges can vary from 500-5,000 acres; although 1,000-1,500 acres is more common. Gray foxes use above ground dens, including brush piles, windrows, and hollow trees, while red foxes usually prefer below ground dens.

DIET: The gray fox is omnivorous, usually feeding on a variety of seasonally available animals and plants. Fruits and insects are consumed more frequently during the spring and summer, whereas animal matter is consumed in higher quantities in the fall and winter. The gray fox's diet is about 50-60% mammalian prey that includes cotton rats, mice, rabbits and an occasional fawn. Avian prey, particularly ground nesting birds, make 10-20% of their diet; invertebrates and fruits compose the remaining items.

DISEASES: Canine distemper is the primary disease affecting gray fox populations, although rabies, leptospirosis and infectious canine hepatitis may affect populations. Foxes are also infested with a variety of external and internal parasites such as ticks, fleas, and canine heartworms.

Photo Credit: Dave Schaffer, USFWS



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