

## Red fox

### *Vulpes vulpes*

Is it a dog? A coyote? No, it's a red fox. With yellow eyes, bright orange fur, black feet, and a bushy tail with the little white tip, red fox is striking. Long and lean, red foxes average between three and four feet long and weigh only eight to fifteen pounds.

Red foxes are often found in grasslands and at the edges of wooded areas instead of in the wooded areas themselves, which is where their favorite things to eat (rabbits and rodents) live. Though rabbits and rodents make up their preferred diet, red foxes are omnivorous and will eat almost anything, including insects, plants and even carcasses. Never one to waste, the red fox will bury any unfinished food and mark it with urine with the intent of eating it later—unless a skunk, opossum or another fox gets there first.

Mating season is between December and February with the big fox “love fest” occurring in January. The mating pair is generally monogamous after breeding and during the raising of the pups. Breeding time is the only time that foxes ever live in a den.

This time of year, pups are just entering the world. Born in the den, after one month the rambunctious youngsters start to venture outside. The pups stay around the den until the fall when they are fully grown. At a year old, red foxes will start families of their own.

Red foxes are as mischievous as their name suggests. Legal trappers have noticed that red foxes often play games with them by digging and finding traps. Usually, the foxes proudly leave behind a dropping on the trap itself or nearby as if to say “Ha, can’t get me.” to the trapper and “Hey all you other foxes, watch out.”

Scientists from the IDNR speculate that coyotes have somewhat lowered populations of foxes in the outlying areas of Chicagoland because the two canids compete for food. Coyotes being bigger and stronger often force red foxes out of their territories. As a result of this competition for resources in rural areas, foxes are migrating into more densely populated suburban and urban areas, areas where coyotes are slower to follow. This migration means that your chances of seeing a red fox in the Chicago River watershed are good if you keep your eyes open.

But always remember, red foxes can carry rabies. If you see one behaving strangely, wandering in circles and roaming around in the daytime, call the authorities because it may have rabies.

