

Status of the Kit Fox, *Vulpes velox* in the High Plains

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Historically the Kit Fox, *Vulpes velox*, seems to have been a common predator of the Great Plains of the United States and Canada. However, predator control measures in use during the 50-75 years prior to 1946, aimed primarily at the coyote, were so effective against this less wary species, that up until very recent times it has been considered to be an almost-vanished component of the plains fauna. That this condition has prevailed almost to the present in Oklahoma is evidenced by the fact that Blair (1939) did not list any known records of its existence in the State. Since the writer began accumulating records of Oklahoma mammals in 1946 no records, or even second-hand accounts, of the species were received until the present year. During the same time two records for the state of Texas were received, one from Swisher County in 1948, and one from Dallam County in 1955. Both of these specimens are in the Oklahoma A & M College Museum of Zoology. It has recently been learned that a specimen exists in the No-Mans-Land Museum at Goodwell, but the date of collection is not known at this writing.

The first reports to be received in 1956 were in early May, when Mr. Robert Downing, a graduate student at Oklahoma A & M College reported observing the excavation of a den north of Booker, Texas, approximately one mile south of the Oklahoma State line. A female and five pups were secured. They were kept in confinement at Woodward, Oklahoma, but subsequently all but one pup escaped. Downing also reported another den having been excavated near Elmwood, in Beaver County. The disposition of this family is not known. However, he also has reported that several persons living in the vicinity of Elmwood have told of keeping Kit Foxes as pets. In July 1956 the writer was given a half-grown male Kit Fox that had been secured as a pup from a den a few miles south of Guymon, Texas County. This specimen is still at hand and is thriving. The third family group known to the writer was one excavated in Woodward County by a local farmer. Mr. Downing secured one of these and brought it to Stillwater where it later escaped. At last report the adult female was still confined at Woodward.

Mr. Farrell Copelin reports seeing two young foxes about June 15 in the possession of a farmer near Arnett, who had secured them from a den near Booker, Texas. He has also reported hearing of one fox in captivity in Shattuck, Ellis County.

Dr. Harold Hefley reports having seen a kit fox killed by traffic on U. S. 64, 2 miles south and 3 miles east of Eva, in Texas County, Oklahoma, in November of 1956.

A story also appeared in the Oklahoma City newspaper, "The Daily Oklahoman" in late summer of 1956, concerning a local man who returned from a trip to his wheat farm in the Texas Panhandle, location undisclosed, with two foxes which were captured there. The accompanying picture leaves no doubt that the specimens were *Vulpes velox*.

A late report has also been received from Mr. John Preston, who observed one active den near Lorenzo, in Crosby County, Texas. He further stated that foxes may be seen on the country roads of that area almost nightly.

Finally there is a report from Mr. Hugh Mercer, of a fox being extracted from a hole near Waynoka, in Woods County, Oklahoma, on April 8, 1956 during the annual Waynoka rattlesnake hunt. The hunters released the animal, and its identity cannot therefore be positively verified; however, they are sure that it was not a gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) with which species the hunters were familiar.

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Egoscue (1956) has recently reported on the resurgence of the same (or closely related) species in the Great Basin. He quotes the predator control agents of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in that area as crediting this increase to the new methods of predator control that have been put into effect since the close of World War II. These methods involve the substitution of "1080" stations and cyanide guns for the traditional steel trap or strychnine bait. The 1080 stations are ordinarily very widely spaced, and cyanide guns are located near roads or trails. This leaves large areas over which the Kit Fox may range unmolested, while the more wide-ranging coyote is still satisfactorily controlled. Apparently these factors have been favoring the species in the Panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas as well and the chances of return to its former abundance now seem most favorable.

LITERATURE CITED

- Blair, W. F. 1939. Faunal Relationships and Geographic Distribution of Mammals in Oklahoma. Amer. Midl. Nat. 22(1): 85-133.
- Egoscue, H. J. 1956. Preliminary Studies of the Kit Fox in Utah. Jour. Mamm. 37(3): 351-357.