

OCCURRENCE OF THE RED FOX (*VULPES VULPES*) IN WESTERN OKLAHOMA

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INTRODUCTION

According to Hall and Kelson (1), the known range of *Vulpes vulpes* in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas includes only the forested eastern portions of those states. Blair (2, 3) did not report the species from western Oklahoma in the late 1930's, nor was it known in western Kansas until 1958, when Anderson and Nelson (4) and later Anderson and Fleharty (5) documented its presence there. Eventually, specimens from several counties in western Texas and eastern New Mexico were recorded by Packard and Bowers (6). Dalquest (7) listed specimens from Wichita and Montague counties of north-central Texas. It is surprising, therefore, that the red fox has not heretofore been documented in western Oklahoma. A survey of federal rodent and predator control agents by Glass and Halloran (8) revealed that this fox had been taken by them only in Woods, Canadian, Comanche, and Stephens counties of western Oklahoma. The only specimen preserved, however, is now in the Oklahoma State University Museum (pers. comm., B. P. Glass), and was taken near Bray in Stephens County.

In the Cameron University Museum of Zoology (CUMZ) in Lawton, Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma State University (OSU) collection in Stillwater are specimen or photographic records of red foxes from one eastern county and three additional western Oklahoma counties, as follows. *Jackson County*: tail from road-killed subadult (CUMZ 551) taken 3 mi N of Altus 19 June 1978 by Mrs. Johnnie Reed; *Tillman County*: skin and skull of adult male (CUMZ 554) run over by Ron Bohannon 1 mi NE of Frederick on 1 February 1978; photographs of two live pups caught by Joe and Randy Cardwell in Manitou on 1 June 1978; *Kiowa County*: OSU 10522 is skull from juvenile road-kill collected 2 mi E of Snyder by W. S. Bartush on 11 July 1977; (CUMZ 550) is skull of female road-kill 4 mi W of Snyder collected by Cindy Garber on 10 October 1977; *Pittsburg County*: skin of adult (CUMZ 327) collected near Krebs by John Pickens (a federal rodent and predator control agent) in the 1960's.

Federal trappers have reported no red foxes from Custer County (8), but on 21 September 1968, I observed a male and a female captive pup (about three-quarter adult size) in the town of Custer. These had been part of a litter of six (4 males, 2 females) dug out of a den a half-mile south of Custer the previous May by Mr. Charles Raft. Another litter of three was captured at a den within a mile of the first and at least five dens had been used by these two fox families. Mr. Raft reported that red foxes had been reared locally every spring since 1965. He also related that Sam Laudenschlager, from Thomas, Oklahoma, had released about a half-dozen red foxes from Minnesota for hunting purposes near Taloga in Dewey County (25 miles north of Custer) "several years ago." Other sight records are given in Table 1.

Because seven of the fifteen-odd records in this paper involved road-killed foxes or those feeding along highways, it appears that these foxes had been utilizing carrion for food. Three such reports were in winter, two during summer, and one each in fall and spring.

Vulpes vulpes was not reported from the arid grasslands of the southern Great Plains during the first six decades of this century. Originally an animal of the eastern forests, it probably at first followed the permanent water courses westward across the prairies, and later relied for water on the numerous stock ponds that proliferated in this region after World War II. Apparently never a conspicuous part of the grassland fauna, it seems to have adapted to Man and his activities, even utilizing domestic and road-killed animals for food. A few red foxes

TABLE 1. *Sight records of Vulpes vulpes in western Oklahoma.*

County	Location	Date	Observer(s) / Collector	Annotations
Beckham	Near Sweetwater	1960's	Federal trapper	Collected; pers. comm., John Pickens
Canadian	Hinton: 4 mi. E, 1½ mi N	Mid-Aug. 1975	Brad Carlton	Road-kill
Comanche	Lawton: Cameron University	Spring of 1975	Harry Wright	Observed fox in parking lot
Comanche	Wichita Mts. Wildlife Refuge Hdqtrs.	7 July 1978	Mike K. Clemons	Saw adult
Cotton	Cookietown; 2 mi N, 5 mi W	Fall of 1970	Jerry Overton	One shot and skinned, but skin not pre- served
Jackson	Altus	8 Nov. 1978	S. Keith Adams	Observed adult
Kiowa	Snyder: ½ mi S	20 Jan. 1976	S. Keith Adams	Saw one eating jack- rabbit on highway at night
Kiowa	Snyder: 1 mi SW	Jan.-Feb. 1976	Dale R. Mills	Repeatedly observed two adults
Roger Mills	West of Cheyenne	1960's	Federal trapper	Collected; pers. comm., John Pickens
Tillman	Frederick: im- mediate vicinity	Between 1975- 1978	Mike Haynie, Ron Bohannon, Guy Cougar, & others	Several sightings of adults and pups
Tillman	Tipton	25 May 1973	C. L. Henderson	Road-kill

have reportedly been introduced into this area for hunting; some of these may have survived to breed with native stock. Numerous recent sightings, particularly in southwestern Oklahoma, indicate that the species may be on the increase.

REFERENCES

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