

Welcome to the

Grey Fox Habitat



Grey Fox Classification

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Canidae

Genus: *Urocyon*

Species: *cinereoargenteus*

**Subspecies (Southern
U.S):** *floridanus*



Who Are Grey Foxes?

Foxes are medium-sized mammals that belong to the Carnivora Order and share the Canidae Family with wolves, dogs, coyotes, and jackals. What sets the grey fox apart from all the other Canids is its unique ability to climb trees. This exceptional ability has earned the grey fox an alternate name, the tree fox. It is also common to see its name spelled as the gray fox.

There are five genera of foxes, worldwide, which include 22 different species altogether. The grey fox and the island gray fox are the only two species found in the *Urocyon* genus, which is a Greek term for tailed dog. The scientific name of the grey fox is the *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*, where cinerero means ash-colored, and argenteus means silver. There are 16 subspecies of the grey fox, in all.

What Do They Look Like?

The grey fox has a deep-chested body with four short, powerful legs, an ideal physique for speed and endurance. Its muzzle is elongated, its ears are pointed, and its tail is bushy. Grey foxes have extremely sharp, curved claws that allow them to dig dens, capture their prey, climb trees, and protect themselves from predators.

From nose to tail, grey foxes measure between 32 and 46 inches, with the tail contributing to over a third of their length. Grey foxes usually weigh about seven to thirteen pounds, with an average height of 12 inches up to their shoulders. Males are only slightly larger than females. The grey fox is covered with a

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salt-and-pepper colored coat that contains a combination of grey, black, white, and red fur. As its name suggests, the grey fox is mostly grey on its body, face, and belly. The red fur on the sides of its face, neck, ears, legs, and on parts of its tail sometimes causes this species to be confused with the red fox. The black and white fur is blended throughout the grey fox's coat, but its cheeks, muzzle, and throat are all white, and the tip of the tail is black.



of its feet, and just inside the anus. The grey fox uses the scent glands inside the anus to mark its territory and to attract potential mates, just as a domesticated dog uses these scent glands.

What Kind of Tracks Do They Make?

Grey foxes have extremely sharp, curved claws that allow them to dig dens, capture their prey, climb trees, and protect themselves from predators. Sometimes the claws can be seen in the tracks, but other times they are not visible. Their tracks are small, usually less than two inches long, and they reveal four toes. These paw prints are symmetrical with the two toes in the center lying slightly ahead of the toes that lie on either side.

What Is Their Place in Nature?

At one time, grey foxes were a target of both hunters who hunted them for sport, and trappers who hunted them for their fur. This threatened the species in some areas, causing them to become limited in numbers. However, today the *U. cinereoargenteus* is abundant, as this animal has managed to maintain a stable population over the last few decades. Exact numbers of the grey fox population are hard to obtain because they live in such large ranges, exhibit secretive habits, and are difficult to capture. Grey foxes hold multiple roles in nature, serving as predators, prey, and hosts for several different parasites.

What Do Grey Foxes Eat?

The grey fox is omnivorous, meaning it eats both plants and other animals. Unlike other Canids that hunt in packs, the grey fox hunts alone. It will stalk its prey for a while then



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pounce, using its long curved claws to trap and kill its victim. The preferred meal for a grey fox is a cottontail rabbit, but it will feast on other small mammals such as mice, wood rats, and cotton rats. This variety of vertebrates makes up the majority of a grey fox's diet in the winter. The grey fox also



eats invertebrates such as grasshoppers, beetles, butterflies, and moths. Along with birds, eggs, fruits, nuts, and grains, these invertebrates make up most of a grey fox's diet in the spring. If a grey fox has excess food, it is a common habit to bury it and mark it with urine or their scent glands to ward off other animals and to make it easier to find later.

What Dangers Do Grey Foxes Face?

Within their own home range, foxes battle with the factors of competition between other foxes, habitat quality, and the availability of food.

However, the more serious dangers grey foxes struggle with are humans, predation, parasites, and disease. Humans pose a threat to grey foxes through hunting, trapping, and the use of automobiles. Also, a farmer may resort to killing a fox if it acts as a nuisance to his animals. The four main predators of the grey fox are the coyote, the bobcat, the golden eagle, and the great horned owl. The grey fox will either hide under cover or climb trees to evade danger. Grey foxes will fight for their lives with their teeth and sharp claws if they are unable to escape in time.

Many different parasites use grey foxes as hosts, which can lead to discomfort, disease, and even death. There are over thirty types of external parasites that live on these animals, some including lice, ticks, mites, chiggers, and fleas. Some examples of internal parasites that grey foxes may encounter are roundworms, flatworms, and tapeworms. Because of these parasitic organisms, the grey fox is vulnerable to canine diseases such as distemper, parvovirus, and heartworms. While grey foxes rarely contract rabies, they must avoid canine distemper, which is the most common fatal disease of this species.

Where Do Grey Foxes Live?

Grey foxes are native to 12 different countries ranging from southern Canada to the South American countries Venezuela and Columbia.

They can be found throughout the United States, except in the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains. The subspecies of grey fox that lives Florida is the *Urocyon cinereoargenteus floridanus*, which exists in the Gulf States that lie in the southeastern United States. These states include southern South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and eastern Texas. Mississippi, and eastern Texas.



What Is Their Habitat in the Wild Like?

Grey foxes prefer to make their home in deciduous forests and brushy woodlands that lie in lower elevations. They are almost always surrounded by trees, brush, or shrubbery. Grey foxes prefer areas with more cover because of their reclusive nature, and they do their best to stay hidden from



people and other animals. However, sometimes they can be found living on the outskirts of urban areas. Proximity to water and availability of food are also requirements grey foxes when it comes to choosing a place to settle down.

Where Do They Live?

Grey foxes will use their long claws to dig a den or they will find another small mammal's abandoned underground burrow to live in. It is more common, though, for their dens to be

located in hollow trees or logs, rock piles, crevices between and under cliffs, and even in the lower forest canopy. Using its ability to climb trees, the *U. cinereoargenteus* will sometimes create its den in hollow tree trunks and limbs, up to 32 feet above the forest floor! Dry leaves, shredded bark, and grass serve as additional components of their homes. Grey foxes are territorial, so they will use their scent glands and urine to mark what belongs to them. A grey fox's home range usually extends from about two to seven miles, but they only cover a small portion of this each day.

How Do Grey Fox Families Live?

Grey foxes typically live six to eight years in the wild but can live up to 12 years in captivity. It is common for grey foxes to live in family groups that consist of a male, a female, and their young. The male is known as the dog fox, the female is known as a vixen, and the babies are known as pups, kits, or cubs. Grey foxes are monogamous, so they are very selective when it comes to choosing their life-long mate.

What Is Their Life Cycle?

Grey foxes reproduce once a year during the breeding season, which takes place in January and February. After about 53 days of pregnancy, the mother gives birth to one to seven pups, with an average litter size of three to four pups. Baby foxes are born a dark brown color and their average birth weight is only three ounces. They are born blind and do not open their eyes for the first time until about two weeks later.



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Both the male and the female take care of their young, living as a family unit. The male provides food for the female and the young, while the female keeps the young sheltered in the den. Pups are weaned when they are about four weeks old, and it is near this time that they eat their first solid food. Grey fox babies are particularly playful, chewing on objects they find and play fighting with their siblings. At four months of age, grey foxes are taught to hunt. Grey foxes are ready to leave their parents and become independent when they become sexually mature at about 10 months old.



How Do Grey Foxes Communicate?

The *Urocyon cinereoargenteus* is usually a quiet animal, but when it is vocal, it will bark, growl, snarl, squeal, and screech. The harsh-sounding screech grey foxes emit is probably the most identifiable sound this species makes. The biggest form of communication between foxes, however, is by scent. They can distinguish individual foxes by the smell of their scent glands. Grey foxes also rely on their scent when it comes to attracting a potential mate. Thirdly, these animals can claim their territory by marking it with their scent, just as domesticated dogs do.

How Do Grey Foxes Spend Their Time?

As nocturnal animals, grey foxes typically leave their den at twilight to hunt at night. When a grey fox is not searching for prey, it is under cover avoiding danger in its den, in woods and brush, or in a tree. This is a description of how animals in this species spend their days. However, they are willing to hunt during the day when it is necessary, and they will also enjoy sunbathing when the weather is cold. Grey foxes do not hibernate during the winter, but instead, remain active throughout the year.

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