



Gray Fox in New Jersey

The Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) is one of the most beautiful furbearers in North America. Common in New Jersey as well as many parts of the United States where deciduous woodlands provide habitat, it is a seldom seen, secretive carnivore. Habitats for gray fox include wooded, brushy, and rocky areas. And, although they are occasionally seen in old fields and farm country, they do not prefer agricultural habitats, unlike the red fox.

Geographically, gray foxes live in North, Central and South America and range from extreme southern Canada to northern Venezuela and Colombia. This range *excludes* the mountainous northwestern United States, the Great Plains, and eastern Central America.

In New Jersey the gray fox is classified as a game species and a furbearer. Male foxes, (both red and gray) are called “dogs” and females are known as “vixens”.

Like most foxes, gray foxes resemble small, slightly built dogs with bushy tails. The general coloration of a gray fox is a strikingly beautiful grizzled gray that appears on the face, sides and tail. Portions of the legs and lower sides as well as large areas of the neck, ears and bottom portion of the tail are a rusty, reddish color with white areas on the chin, belly and insides of the legs.

Adult gray foxes weigh from about 6.5 to 15 pounds. Generally, a large male will weigh around 11 to 12 pounds, and males will be slightly larger than females. Total length measurements (body and tail) range from about 30 to 44 inches including the 11-to-17-inch tail.

A gray fox skull differs from all other North American canids by widely separated temporal ridges that form a U-shape.

The breeding season for gray foxes in New Jersey and the mid-Atlantic region usually occurs in February but within the gray fox’s geographic range this will vary somewhat; occurring earlier farther north and later in the south. Gestation takes between 51 and 60 days (average 53 days) and the litter size is generally four to six young but can range from one to seven. Males assist the females in raising the young.

By about three months, the pups will begin to accompany their parents while they hunt. After about four months, the young will have their permanent teeth and will forage on

their own. In autumn the family group will break up as the young reach maturity and disperse. Both male and female will reach sexual maturity by one year.

Gray foxes generally have a home range of about 500 acres, however, home range size varies and can be much larger, because as with other animals the lack or availability of prey and den sites may extend or limit home range size.

Gray foxes have a capability unique for a member of the dog family; this is their ability to climb trees. Their strong, hooked claws allow them to scramble up trees to avoid predators and to obtain fruit. They descend primarily by jumping from branch to branch. Gray foxes are nocturnal or crepuscular and they usually remain denned during the day in hollow trees, stumps or old woodchuck burrows.

The gray fox is a generally a solitary hunter, but they may hunt as a pair, usually with a mate or offspring. They eat a wide variety of food types. The most important food source for the gray fox may be the cottontail but voles, field mice, shrews, and birds are readily eaten. The gray fox generally supplements its diet with whatever fruits are in season; generally utilizing more vegetable matter than the red fox.