

# *For Creative Minds*

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## **Red Fox Fun Facts and Adaptations**

Young foxes are called kits or pups. Adult female foxes are called vixens, and adult males are called dog foxes.

Foxes are related to pet dogs, but they are wild animals. Pet dogs, foxes, wolves, coyotes, and jackals are all part of the canine family (Canidae). Red foxes are the only North American canid species to have white-tipped tails.

Red foxes eat fruits, berries, grasses, insects, and other animals (prey). Their favorite prey includes mice, chipmunks, squirrels, voles, rabbits, beetles, and grasshoppers.

Red foxes are most active at dusk and dawn (crepuscular). In the summer, they are more active at night (nocturnal) because their prey, mice, are active then. Foxes may hunt during the day (diurnal) in the winter because it's harder to find food.

Red foxes stalk prey and then pounce to capture and kill. They can hear small underground animals and will sometimes dig to get them.

Kits learn to hunt by playing with their siblings. They practice stalking, pouncing, and even nipping or biting each other.

After capturing prey, foxes eat until they are no longer hungry. They'll hide (cache) leftovers in a few different places, often digging a hole to bury it. They'll return to dig it up and eat it a few hours or a few days later.

A fox marks prey it has partially eaten by going to the bathroom on or near it. This warns other animals to stay away from the food.





Adult foxes have huge, bushy tails that are longer than half their bodies.

Foxes use their tails to stay warm, to balance when running and pouncing, and to “talk” to each other. Like pet dogs, they wag their tails when happy and put their tails between their legs when scared.



Foxes rely on their sense of smell. Their noses stick out in front of the rest of their faces so they can easily smell scents carried by the wind. They use scents to track animals. They also use scents to mark and claim their territory and to communicate with each other.



Red foxes use their large, upright ears to find prey. They even point their ears to follow sounds.

Their eyes are set in the front of their heads so they can easily see and judge distances to pounce on prey.



Their teeth are sharp to capture and kill prey. Once they have killed their prey, they use their teeth to eat.

They also use their teeth to carry things in their mouths.



When the kits are about two months old, their blue eyes turn brown.

*Can you tell which of these kits is older?*

# Red Fox Life Cycle Sequencing

Use the months of the year to put the red fox life cycle events in order.

By the end of **June and early July**, the kits have shed their fur a second time. Their third coat is usually bright red in color. By the time the kits are about 12 weeks (3 months) old, they are eating solid food and no longer nurse. Their parents begin teaching them how to hunt—usually one or two at a time.

By late **September or October**, the kits are fully-grown foxes. They leave the den area to find and claim their own territory where they'll likely live for the rest of their lives.

Kits are born in **March or April**. A vixen usually has a litter of five kits but can have as many as ten at a time! When born, red foxes have gray-colored fur, are blind and helpless. They drink milk from their mother and rarely leave the den.

By **August** the kits begin to go off with each other on hunting trips and then on their own. They still sleep together in the den.

The male and female foxes usually mate in **January or February**. The female (vixen) prepares her dens. She'll use one as the main den. Once the kits are born, the parents will move them to another den if there is danger.

Even though it is cold and there may be snow on the ground in **November and December**, foxes usually sleep outside curled up with their bushy tails wrapped around them to keep warm. Their fur is thick and warm. The dens are only used to raise young.

When the kits are four or five weeks old (usually in **May or early June**), they come out of the den. At first, the kits stay very close to the den. Their gray fur sheds (molts) and grows back in a sandy color to hide them (camouflage). The mother brings up eaten food out of her stomach (regurgitates) to feed the kits something other than her milk.



## What Do Red Foxes Eat?

Which of the following things do foxes eat? Answers are upside down, below.



Answer: All of the above!