



Red Wolf

Canis rufus

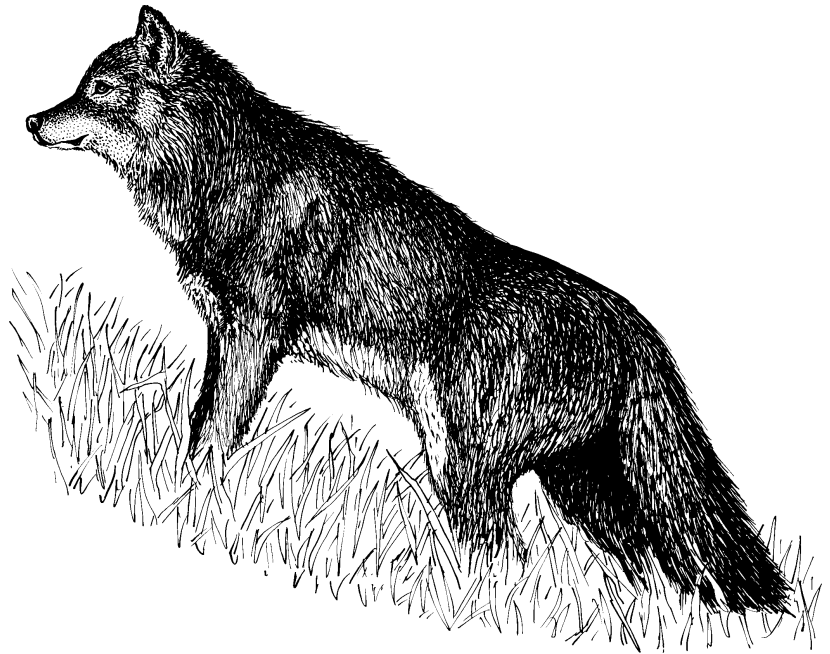
Along with its larger cousin the gray or timber wolf, the red wolf has been persecuted and killed throughout its range in North America for many years. Europeans settling in the New World brought with them an ingrained fear and hatred of all wolves. But wolves as predators help maintain the overall health of the populations of prey species they feed upon.

Eight species of the genus *Canis* are found worldwide, with four of them found in North America. Of the four, the coyote, the red wolf and the domestic dog are found in North Carolina. The coyote is a recent inhabitant, having either migrated here from Tennessee and other states to the west, or having been released here illegally. The red wolf has recently been reintroduced by wildlife biologists as part of a carefully controlled restoration project.

History and Status

The red wolf once ranged throughout much of the Southeast. By the early 20th century, habitat destruction and predator-control programs had resulted in the extermination of the red wolf from much of its range. The last wild populations existed on the southeastern coast of Texas and the southwestern coast of Louisiana. The remaining small population was captured from the wild in the 1970s, and through captive breeding, the population began to grow. The species was declared extinct in the wild in 1980.

In November 1986, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service flew four



pairs of adult wolves to the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County in eastern North Carolina. There, on the newly formed refuge that provided the size and habitat to favor an attempt at restoration, the wolves were released from their holding pens in September 1987—the first to be reintroduced to a wild habitat.

Officially, however, red wolves are still considered extinct in the wild since these releases are experiments to determine the feasibility of reintroductions. With the additional release of four red wolves in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in October 1991, the future of this species is beginning to look more promising. The red wolf is a federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act. Because of this protection, it is illegal for humans to harm the wolves or their habitat, either directly or indirectly.

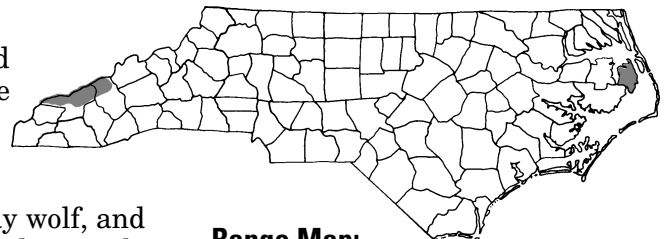
Description

The size of the red wolf falls somewhere between the coyote and the gray wolf. The red wolf is lankier than the gray wolf, and its legs are longer and more slender, enabling it to move about

and maneuver easily in its habitat. It runs and swims very well and uses its excellent sight, hearing and sense of smell when pursuing prey. Color varies widely among red wolves, though it is usually a combination of cinnamon buff or tawny, or cinnamon red, with gray or black on the back and tip of the tail. At one time, some individuals were totally black or gray. The red wolf's undersides vary in color from near white to a pinkish buff.

Habitat and Habits

Red wolves inhabit upland and bottomland forests, coastal prairies, swamps and marshes. These animals require dense vegetation to protect denning sites and resting areas. Not much is known about the red wolf's day-to-day activities in the wild because the animal's population declined so rapidly before it was studied. However, red wolves are not



Range Map:

Occupied Range ■

as social as gray wolves. Red wolves commonly live in groups of two or three, but sometimes form larger packs. Still, the basic social unit consists of a mated pair.

The red wolf is very secretive and mostly nocturnal with much of its activity concentrated around dawn, dusk and early evening. During the winter, however, it frequently becomes more diurnal. Hunting is usually centered around a small area near its home range, and after about a week, it moves to another home range to hunt.

Dens are found in hollow trees, stream banks and sand knolls. They are either dug by the pair or are similar sites taken over when other animals abandon them. The dens are usually 7½ to 8 feet long and about 3.3 feet below the surface.

Range and Distribution

Originally, the red wolf was found in the southeastern section of North America, possibly from southern Pennsylvania as far south and west as central Oklahoma and central Texas. Today, red wolves are kept in zoos across the United States for the purpose of captive breeding. In the wild, however, these animals are found only on the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in eastern North Carolina and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee.

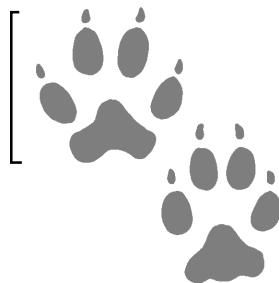
Males inhabit a home range of 45 to 50 square miles, while females tend to have smaller ranges of 25 to 30 square miles. Home ranges of many individuals tend to overlap in productive areas.

People Interactions

The red wolf is a very shy animal and is rarely seen in the wild. Red wolves appear to be nonaggressive and pose little threat to humans directly, but they will take an occasional domestic animal as prey.



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References

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Credits

Written by Kevin Franks and Perry W. Sumner.

Illustrated by J.T. Newman.

Produced August 1992 by the Division of Conservation Education, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

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WILD Facts

RED WOLF

Classification

Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora

Average Size

Length: 4.2-5.6 ft. from nose to tail
Height: 2.1-2.7 ft.
Weight: Males 44-90.4 lbs.; females 35.3-64 lbs.

Food

Deer and a wide variety of smaller animals such as rabbits, squirrels, mice, muskrats, nutria, fish, insects, birds, frogs, turtles and raccoons. Also eats carrion, berries and other plants. It will also occasionally eat a domestic animal.

Breeding

Males are called dogs. Females are called bitches. Males reach sexual maturity between their second and third years, while females reach sexual maturity between their first and second years. Mating usually takes place from January to March. The gestation period is 60 to 63 days.

Young

Young are called pups. One litter per year. Each litter usually contains from 2 to 8 young, though it can contain as many as 12. Each young pup weighs between 13 to 15 ounces.

Life Expectancy

Rarely beyond 4 years in the wild, but can reach 14 years in captivity.