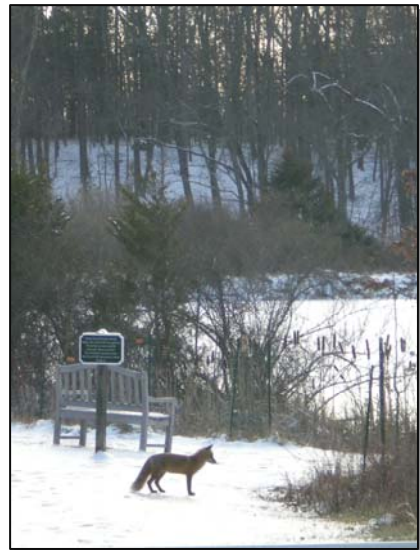


CRAZY LIKE A FOX

Perhaps the best known reference to foxes is the pangram, “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”, which is used to test the skills of typists because it contains all 26 letters of the English alphabet. Then there is the title of this Creature Feature, “crazy like a fox”, a true oxymoron, meaning someone who is seemingly foolish but in fact is capable of extreme cunning. Both the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) have been renowned as crafty animals for centuries and celebrated in mythology and fables, children’s nursery rhymes and colloquialisms.

These monogamous mammals both belong to the order Carnivora and both can easily be seen running through the fields and hills within our watershed. They are primarily crepuscular (active at dusk and dawn, when the light level is low) however, they have a tendency of becoming nocturnal in areas of great artificial lighting and human populace.

The gray fox is largely omnivorous, and is the only member of the dog family that can climb trees, seeking refuge or searching for roosting birds. It can reach an adult weight of 7.9 to 15 lbs. and readily eats voles and shrews while supplementing its diet with fruits. The gray fox generally eats more fruit than the red fox, and is easily differentiated from the red fox by the lack of ‘black stockings’ that stand out in the latter. Resembling small slender dogs with bushy tails, it has gray streaked upperparts, a buff neck and a black-tipped tail. This solitary hunter also possesses excellent senses of sight and smell.



The larger red fox can reach an adult weight of 6.5 to 24 lbs., is mainly carnivorous and enjoys a diet of insects, mollusks, earthworms and crayfish, as well as eggs, small reptiles, rabbits and birds. It is most commonly a rusty red with a white underbelly, black ear tips and legs and a distinctive white tipped tail. During autumn and winter the red fox will grow more fur, a so-called “winter fur”, that it sheds with the onset of spring, reverting back to the short fur for the duration of the summer months. Referred to as a “cat like canine” because of its tremendous agility and distinctive vertical-slit pupils, similar to those of domestic cats, the red fox possesses poor eyesight. However, like a cat, it will use its long tail for balance and complex movement as well as a warm busy blanket in the wintertime.

Both the red and gray fox breed once a year, producing anywhere from one to nine pups that weigh approximately 3.50 ounces at birth. Gray foxes may live 6-10 years in the wild unlike the red fox, which has an average life span of 3 years. The red fox has the ability to communicate using a variety of vocalizations, facial expressions and scent marking. Individuals have voices that are distinguishable, and there have been 28 different kinds of vocalizations described in red foxes. The gray fox, as with all canids,

most likely communicates through scent markings. Both of these beautiful, clever creatures help to control the rodent and rabbit population as well as disperse seeds by eating fruit. But it is the red fox's soft luxurious fur that is the most sought after. Along with the American mink, the red fox is the most commonly bred animal in fur farms. Perhaps Aesop had it wrong when he wrote:

The Fox and the Leopard

The Fox and the Leopard disputed which was the more beautiful of the two. The Leopard exhibited one by one the various spots which decorated his skin. But the Fox, interrupting him, said, "And how much more beautiful than you am I, who am decorated, not in body, but in mind."

For more information, please see:

[New Hampshire Public Television Nature Works](#)

[National Geographic – Red Fox](#)

[Bear Tracker – Natural History of Gray Foxes](#)

[The Fox Den – Sound Files](#)