

Get to Know the San Joaquin Kit Fox

Saving Species Together ~ *Everyone can help protect species!*



SAN JOAQUIN KIT FOX

The San Joaquin (SJ) kit fox is one of two subspecies of kit foxes living in California; however, the SJ kit fox is the only subspecies endemic to the state. It was a thriving species in the 1930s, making its home in native grasslands of the Central Valley. But shrinking habitat caused by urbanization and agricultural expansion led the federal government to list this native canid as an endangered species and the state to list it as threatened, decades ago. California's total population of SJ kit foxes may now be down to a few thousand animals. To make matters worse, its favorite food, the kangaroo rat, is likewise endangered as the arid habitat it prefers continues to disappear.

Role in the Ecosystem

SJ kit foxes play an important role in the ecosystem, but because they are adapting to changes in the landscape that are caused by urban development, sometimes humans find themselves in conflict with this typically shy animal. SJ kit foxes have even become established in more urban areas such as Bakersfield, Taft and Coalinga.

Threats

The main prey of SJ kit foxes are rodents, but they will also eat rabbits, insects, and lizards. Kit foxes typically are most active between sunset and sunrise, but in cool weather they can be seen out during the day with their pups. To avoid hot weather and conserve moisture, kit foxes make use of underground dens year 'round, which is unique in the canid family. They also use these dens to raise young and escape from predators. Outside of the urban environment, the average kit fox will use 11 different dens each year. But urban kit foxes have smaller territories, so use fewer dens. SJ kit foxes will also use man-made structures such as culverts, pipes, junk-yard debris, dumpsters, and portable buildings for dens.

In their natural habitat, their main predators are coyotes and bobcats, but the primary cause of death for urban foxes is vehicle strikes. Poisons, such as rodenticides, strangulation in sports netting, and entombment kill SJ kit foxes living in cities as well. Kit foxes get poisoned directly when they eat the bait, or indirectly when they eat a rodent or other prey animal that has consumed poisoned bait. Strangulation in sports netting occurs when low-hanging nets are left out at parks, schools, or sports centers. Entombment usually happens when people bury or fill-in SJ kit fox dens with compacted dirt, cement, or large objects, such as ornamental plants, which block the openings to their dens and trap them inside.

Given their small size and curious nature, SJ kit foxes are popular with city residents. Weighing about five pounds, they're the size of a small house cat, with big ears and a long bushy tail. They are easily habituated in their urban environment - often losing their caution and fear of people. This can then expose them to danger from vehicles, sports nets, poisons, and construction activities.