
Fennec Fox

(*Vulpes zerda*)

Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Carnivora*

Family: *Canidae*

Characteristics:

The smallest of all canids, fennec foxes are 14-16 inches (35-40 cm) long with 7-12 inch tails and weigh 2-3 lbs (0.9-1.4 cm). Their coats are long, soft, and thick ranging in color from reddish cream to light fawn to almost white for excellent camouflage. Tails are bushy with black tips. Furred paws give traction for running in sand and provide protection from the extreme heat of the desert terrain. They have the largest ears relative to body size in any canids.

Behavior: Adapted to life in the desert, they live in small communities of about 10. They use their large ears to dispel heat and track prey underneath the sand. They do not require water as they hydrate through their food. However, in captivity we do provide them water so they can choose to drink it if they want. In daylight they will hide in burrows up to 32 feet long with multiple entrances and exits to avoid the hottest part of the day. Territorial, they mark terrain with urine and feces. Vocalization is manifested by whimpers, barks, shrieks, squeaks, growls, howls or chatter.

Reproduction: Foxes are monogamous and mate for life. Breeding season occurs in January/ February with females giving birth in March/ April. Litters consist of 2-5 "kits," born fully furred and blind, after gestation period of 50 days. Females stay with pups until weaned at 60-70 days while males hunt for food. Pups are sexually mature at 9-11 months.

Diet:

Wild: insects, grasshoppers, locusts, small rodents, lizards, birds, bird eggs, roots, fruits, leaves

Zoo: Dry dogfood kibble supplemented with small amounts of mixed veggies, blueberries, mealworms, crickets, and cooked chicken

Conservation: Least Concern. While there is no major threat to desert dwelling wild populations, habitat loss is occurring within their native range. They are also at risk from the pet trade.

FYI: Extreme panting helps foxes keep temps regulated when the heat climbs. Breathing rates climb from 23 breaths per minute up to 690. Despite diminutive stature, foxes can jump up to 3 feet (1meter) when standing.



Range & Habitat:

North Africa, Sahara Desert, the Arabian Peninsula in sandy deserts and arid regions with desert grasses or scrub vegetation



Lifespan: up to 13 years in captivity, 10 years in the wild

Special Adaptations: Very large ears for hearing prey in the sand and to dissipate body heat

IUCN Conservation Status:

