

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Gray Fox

POST #6—October 7, 2021

Last week, we profiled a species group that is perhaps one of the most abundant species in the Sax-Zim Bog. This week, we contrast that with one of the more difficult to see species in the Sax-Zim Bog's landscape: Gray Fox!

Gray foxes are a recent arrival to northern Minnesota. Their range has expanded steadily northward into our area over the last dozen years or more. The smallest canine in Minnesota, and one of four canine species found in the Sax-Zim Bog, Gray Foxes have short legs and weigh somewhere between 7 and 15 pounds.

One of the most interesting parts of the natural history of this species, is that it is one of two species of canine in North America that can climb trees! Gray foxes have specially adapted front limbs for climbing, which allow their wrists to rotate in order to better grasp a tree. Their claws are also somewhat retractable, but not the extend of felines, which also helps them climb.

Gray foxes are also the most omnivorous of Minnesota's canines, eating a lot of fruits, seeds, or even plant matter during the summer months. True to canine form, they also hunt small mammals, birds, and even insects as part of their diet. They are most active at dawn and dusk, which makes them very hard to find in any landscape.

A distinct species, Gray foxes have a dark tail tip and a contrastingly patterned black, gray, rufous, and white pelage. This species prefers deciduous forests with dense brush and can be found from Northern Minnesota into Venezuela!

More information about this beautiful species included with the photos below.

(Photos by Sparky Stensaas)



This handsome Gray Fox was one of two that spent some time at the Welcome Center during the winter of 2012. As omnivores, they had no problem feeding on the bird seed below our bird feeders at the Welcome Center.



It is not often that you see Gray Foxes during the day, but perhaps this individual had some young to feed! Gray Foxes typically have 4 kits, which stay with their mother up to 7 months.



Gray Fox tracks are easy to ID compared to other canines in Minnesota... they are tiny! There is a penny for scale in this photo and most often their tracks are around house cat sized.



We documented Gray Fox a number of times on trail cameras at the Welcome Center. Comfortable a night, this species is seldom seen by visitors to the area. Note the dark tipped tail in this photo, an ID character of this species.