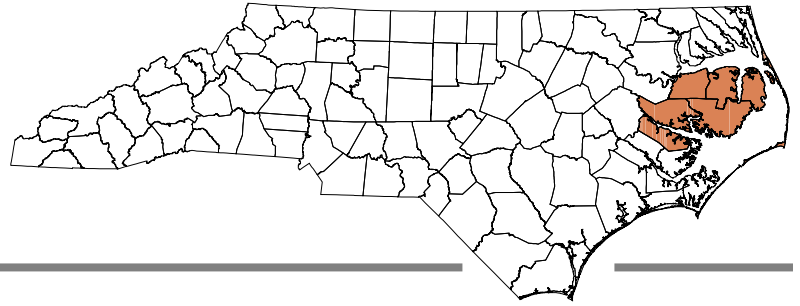

Red wolf

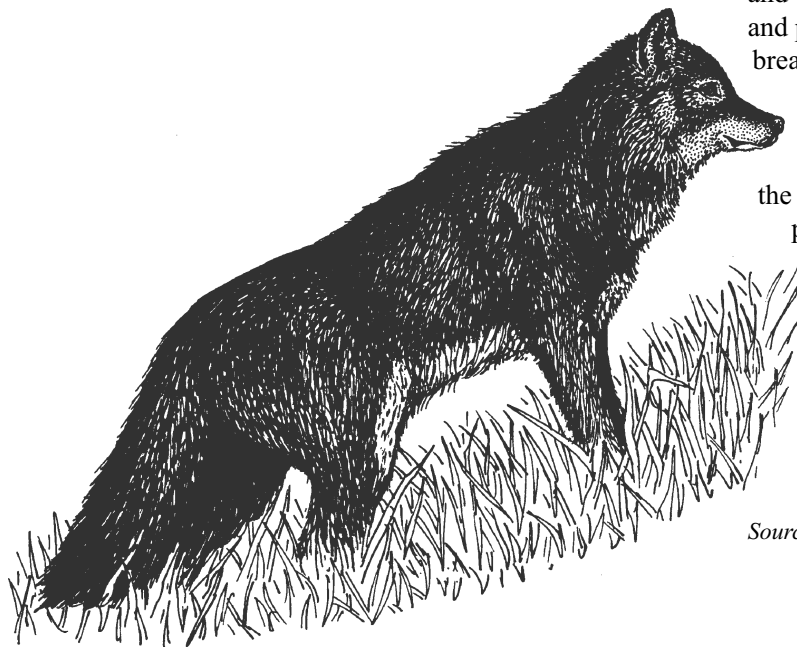
Canis rufus

Endangered (March 11, 1967)



Description: The red wolf is a slender canid between the coyote (*C. latrans*) and the gray wolf (*C. lupus*) in size, with large ears and long legs. Adults weigh 40-80 lb (18-36 kg). Coloration varies from red to yellow, gray, black, or brown and may be mottled. The fur is slightly tawnier and coarser than that of the coyote and the gray wolf. The red wolf holds its bushy tail high while running unlike the coyote, which tucks its tail between its hind legs.

Life History: The wolves usually travel in family groups of 2 or 3, but lone individuals are also seen. Red wolves are opportunistic predators, feeding on small mammals and deer, and do not hunt in packs. It is thought that red wolves mate for life and both parents take part in rearing the young. They exist as small family units (packs) of an adult pair and their young with the offspring dispersing at about 6-12 months. Breeding occurs in February and March, and pups are born in April and May. The average litter size is 4-5 young.



Habitat: On the North Carolina coastal plain, red wolves prefer areas with heavy vegetation for cover, such as fallow fields, marshes, pocosins, and swamps. They were also known to prefer dense forests in mountains and bottomlands before they were eliminated in the wild. They will excavate dens in sand knolls in coastal areas but will also den in hollow trees and culverts.

Distribution: Red wolves were completely extirpated in the wild by the 1970s. In North Carolina, they have been reintroduced into the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Dare, Washington, Tyrrell, and Hyde counties by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They are also found in Beaufort County.

Threats: Expanding human populations and extensive land clearing eliminated much of the red wolf habitat. Large numbers of this species and other large predators were intentionally destroyed by hunting, trapping, and poisoning. Even today there is willful killing of wolves by local farmers and other citizens concerned about the loss of farm animals and pets to wolf predation. This extermination causes a breakdown in the red wolf social structure. Habitat changes have encouraged expansion of the coyote range into historically red wolf territory, resulting in interbreeding with unmated wolves, thus threatening the gene pool of the wolves. Breeding with coyotes may also introduce parasitic infections, which weaken the fecundity of existing wolf groups.

Management Recommendations: Education of the public about the importance of the red wolf in the ecosystem. Protection of existing family units. Maintenance of adequate habitat in undisturbed wilderness such as national forests and wilderness preserves.

Sources: Jackson et al. 1992, Lowe et al. 1990, USFWS 1992a.