

How are swift fox surveys conducted?

Several methods can be used to determine if swift fox are present. Scent stations are used to identify animals by their footprints. Scent stations are constructed by placing a bait or scent lure in an area of finely sifted soil. Carnivores like the swift are attracted to the bait and can be detected by the tracks they leave at each station. Another method is the spotlight survey. Biologists drive designated routes one hour after dark with hopes of seeing the animal during its most active period. Live-traps may be used in special situations when specific information like weight or length needs to be obtained. State law requires any TPW biologist to obtain permission from the landowner before entering onto private land. No data can be recorded or reported from private land without specific written permission from the landowner.

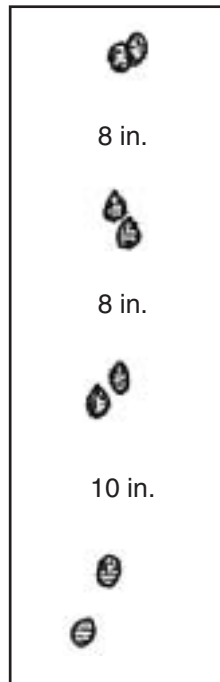
What should I do if I see a swift fox?

Contact:

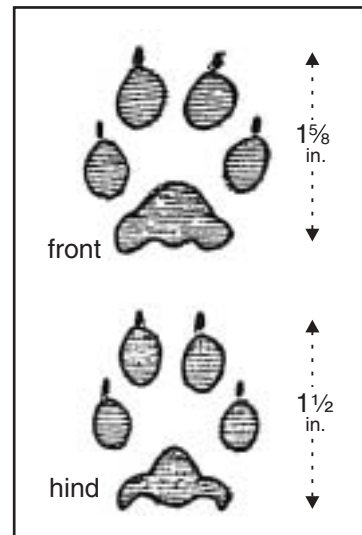
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Pattern of
Swift Fox Tracks
(walking)



Swift Fox Tracks
(actual size)



The Swift Fox



IN TEXAS

PWD BR W7000-0032 (3/97)



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Swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) are one of the smallest of the North American foxes. Their historical range includes the short grass prairie regions of 10 states from Texas to Canada. They have been called the farmyard fox by early settlers because of their willingness to live in close proximity to humans. Native Americans gave them the name "lousy fox" due to the unusual number of fleas present on the foxes and around their dens.

Swift fox populations have declined since the turn of the century and are currently protected in 6 states. Although they are still considered a furbearer in Texas, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considered but ruled against placing the swift fox on the federal endangered species list in 1995. Biologists in the Panhandle are currently working with private landowners to determine the distribution, habitat requirements, and possible threats to swift fox populations. With this information, Texas Parks & Wildlife hopes to develop voluntary conservation strategies for the swift fox.

What does a swift fox look like?

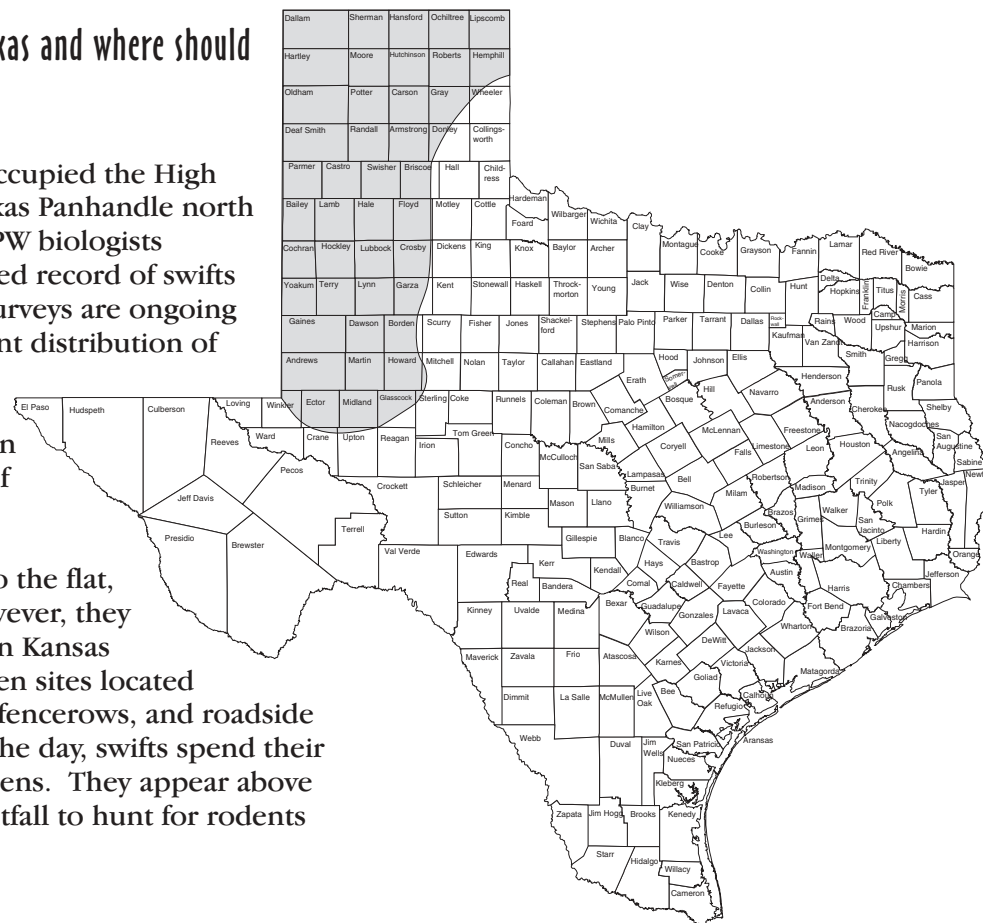
The swift fox is a small cat-sized fox. In the winter, the top of the tail and back are dark gray with tan sides and legs. The throat and belly are light tan to white. Swifts can be distinguished from red and gray foxes by the black tipped tail and black patches on both sides of the muzzle and at the base of the tail. Red fox have a white-tipped tail while grays have a black mane down the length of the tail. Swift fox are also much smaller than other foxes weighing an average of 5.5 lbs while reds and gray foxes average 6.5-11 lbs. Figure 1 shows an example of tracks made by a swift fox.

Are there swift fox in Texas and where should I look for them?

Historically, swift fox occupied the High Plains region of the Texas Panhandle north to Canada. In 1996, TPW biologists obtained the first verified record of swifts in Texas since 1986. Surveys are ongoing to determine the current distribution of the swift fox in Texas.

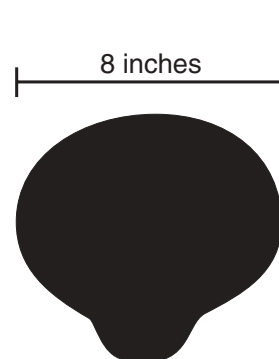
Unfortunately, swifts have only been found in the northwest corner of the Panhandle.

Swift fox are adapted to the flat, short grass prairie, however, they have been discovered in Kansas and Oklahoma using den sites located in winter wheat fields, fencerows, and roadside right-of-ways. During the day, swifts spend their time in underground dens. They appear above ground soon after nightfall to hunt for rodents and other small prey.



How can I distinguish between a swift fox den and other animal dens like skunks and badgers?

Swift fox dens generally have multiple entrances. Swift fox den entrances are 8 inches in diameter



with a characteristic keyhole shape, while skunks are generally smaller and badgers are larger and more round. Skunks and badgers will leave the excavated dirt mounded near the entrance while swift fox will spread it out away from the entrance.

What do they eat? Will they kill livestock?

Swift fox are small animals and are limited to small sized prey such as rodents, birds, reptiles, and insects. Their habit of feeding on the carcasses of livestock often misleads people to believe that the swift will kill young calves, lambs or goat kids. It is possible that a swift would raid a chicken house; however, they are not believed to be as much of a threat to poultry as red or gray foxes.