

## **Fennec Fox**

*Vulpes zerda*



### **Physical Characteristics**

- **Physical description:** The fennec foxes' most distinctive feature are their ears. Fennec Foxes' have the largest ears of any canid in proportion to their skull and body size. When their ears are erect, they account for up to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of their total height. While they do have acute hearing, their large ears play a major role in the dissipation of excess body heat.
- **Coloration:** They have buff or reddish colored thick, silky fur and a cream or white belly and feet. Their tails are tipped in black.
- **Sexual dimorphism:** Males are slightly larger than females
- **Other defining characteristics:** Fennec Foxes also have heavily furred feet, which protect them when walking on hot sand and rocks.

### **Size**

- **Length:** 11.8-15.75 inches (30-40 cm); Tail 7-12 inches (17.75-30.5 cm)
- **Height:** Average 8 inches (20 cm); Ears 4-6 inches (10-15.25 cm)
- **Weight:** 1.75-3.3 pounds (0.8-1.5 kg)

### **Lifespan**

- **Wild:** Up to 10 years
- **Zoos:** Up to 12 years

### **Behaviors**

- **Activity Cycle:** Fennec Foxes are nocturnal, this gives them the cover of dark to hunt as well as protection from the strong daytime sun. Although they have been known to bask and play in the warm sand during the daytime. Fennec foxes use their large ears to locate prey moving under the sand.
- **Lifestyle:** Fennec foxes are avid diggers. They dig burrows with complex tunnel systems, and can dig up to 20 ft. in one night. One tunnel system will possess many entrances, which they can use to flee in times of danger. They also use these dens and burrows to rear pups.
- **Vocalizations:** Their vocalizations vary, including chatters, whimpers, wails, growls and shrieks. Howls are brief and loud, descending in pitch and repeated many times.
- **Social Structure:** Fennec foxes are highly social, living together in family groups that may contain up to 10 individuals (including at least one breeding pair). Despite living in social groups, fennec foxes still prefer to hunt alone.

### **Diet**

- **Wild:** Omnivorous. Small rodents, lizards, birds, eggs, and insects as well as fruit, leaves and roots (as they provide almost 100% of the fennec fox's water intake).
- **Zoo:** Both canine and feline formulated blends of beef and horse meat, in addition to mice, night crawlers, mealworms, super worms, waxworms, crickets, and some fruit and vegetables.

### **Reproduction**

- **Incubation/Gestation Period:** 50 to 53 days.
- **Fledging/Parenting:** Mothers care for the pups for the first two weeks inside a den. Pups are weaned between 30 and 90 days, and are independent at 6 to 9 months. During this time, the mother and father work together rearing the young.
- **Clutch/Litter Size:** 2 to 4 pups on average, though it's not uncommon to have 5 to 6 pups.

- Breeding Behaviors: Fennec foxes reach sexual maturity between 6 to 9 months. They are monogamous, meaning they pair for life. They also defend their own breeding territory. Breeding season happens once yearly, typically in January or February.

### Habitat and Range

- Habitat: Found almost exclusively in arid, sandy regions, containing desert grasses and light scrub vegetation
- Range: Northern Africa. Populations are mainly concentrated in the Sahara, though they are also found in northern Morocco, along the northern tip of the Red Sea to Kuwait, northern Nigeria and Chad.



### Conservation

- IUCN Status: Least Concern
- Contributing factors: This species is relatively widespread in the sandy deserts and semi-deserts of northern Africa to northern Sinai, and there currently are no known major range-wide threats believed to be resulting in a population decline.

### Classification

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Class: Mammalia
- Order: Carnivora
- Family: Canidae
- Genus: *Vulpes*
- Species: *Vulpes zerda*

### Interesting Facts

- Fennec foxes are the smallest species of canid in the world.
- Unlike other fox species, fennec foxes lack a musk gland- this makes them a popular choice for the exotic pet trade.
- Fennec foxes are so well adapted to their Saharan climate that they do not need to drink; instead, they get the majority of the moisture they need from their diet. In times of need, however, nearby vegetation is a handy source of water and may be eaten.
- Captive-raised fennec foxes still attempt to dig within their enclosures. This implies that digging is intuitive, rather than learned.