



CRITTER CONNECTIONS



*All
About
Foxes*



Foxglove Penstemon



The foxglove penstemon (*Penstemon cobaea*), prairie beardtongue, or false foxglove is a flower found on hillsides and rocky areas in Texas from the Rolling Plains and Blackland Prairie ecoregions, south to the Gulf of Mexico. They are native or natural to the United States and grow in many other states from Nebraska to Texas. The bell shaped flowers can be different colors, from white, to dark pink, to light purple. The stems are usually 30cm or 12in tall, but can grow to be twice that size. They will grow flowers two years after the seeds are planted.



False Name

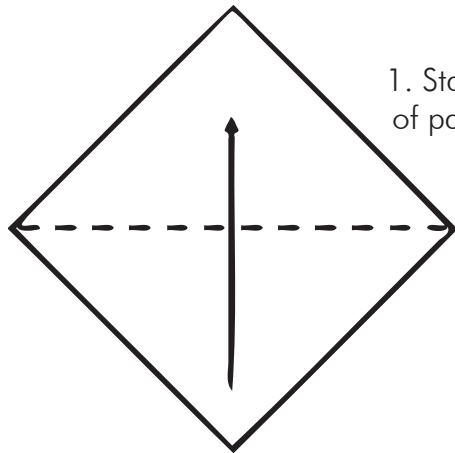
Even though this plant is sometimes called a foxglove, it is a pretender. It is not related to the true foxglove plants which grow in Europe and were brought over to the United States. People call it a false foxglove because it looks a lot like the plants in the true foxglove family. The name foxglove comes from old English words which mean fox's glove, but scientists don't really understand why it was named that. Why do you think it is called a foxglove?

Pretty for Pollinators

The flowers are long and tube or bell shaped and are made of five lobes, two large at the top and three smaller lobes at the bottom. They create a perfect stage for pollinators such as bees to land on the flower and walk inside to drink nectar. There are even dark lines inside the flower showing pollinators where to find the nectar. They commonly attract moths and butterflies. False foxglove is also the host plant for the Dotted Checkerspot butterfly. This butterfly lays her eggs on the leaves of the plant so the larvae can eat the leaves after hatching.

Photos and source: Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center

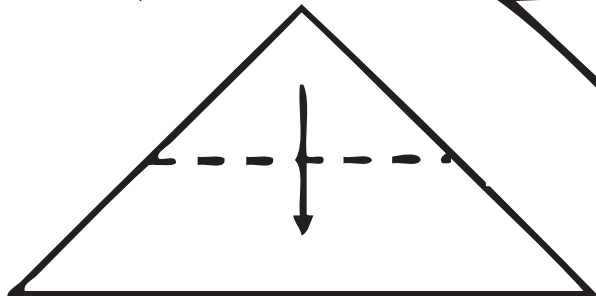
Fox Folder Craft



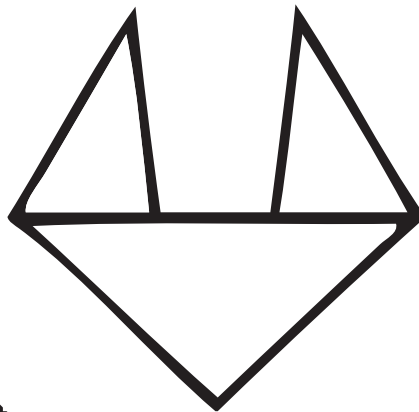
1. Start with a square piece of paper and fold it in half diagonally.



3. Fold the sides up to make ears.



2. Fold the top point down so it reaches the bottom of the triangle.



4. Flip over and draw the fox's face including its ears, eyes, nose, and whiskers.



Did you know...

- ... that there are only two canine species that can climb trees?
- ... that the red fox is the most common fox in the world, but not in Texas?
- ... that foxes make 20-40 different sounds to communicate?
- ... that many cultures consider foxes to be sneaky and tricky animals?
- ... that foxes act like cats, but they are actually related to dogs?
- ... that foxes have great hearing?
- ... that the smallest fox in the world is the size of a kitten?
- ... that foxes usually live alone instead of in groups?
- ... that the arctic fox lives in the very cold tundra habitat in the northern hemisphere?



Swift Fox

Color Me

Gray Fox

Urocyon cinereoargenteus

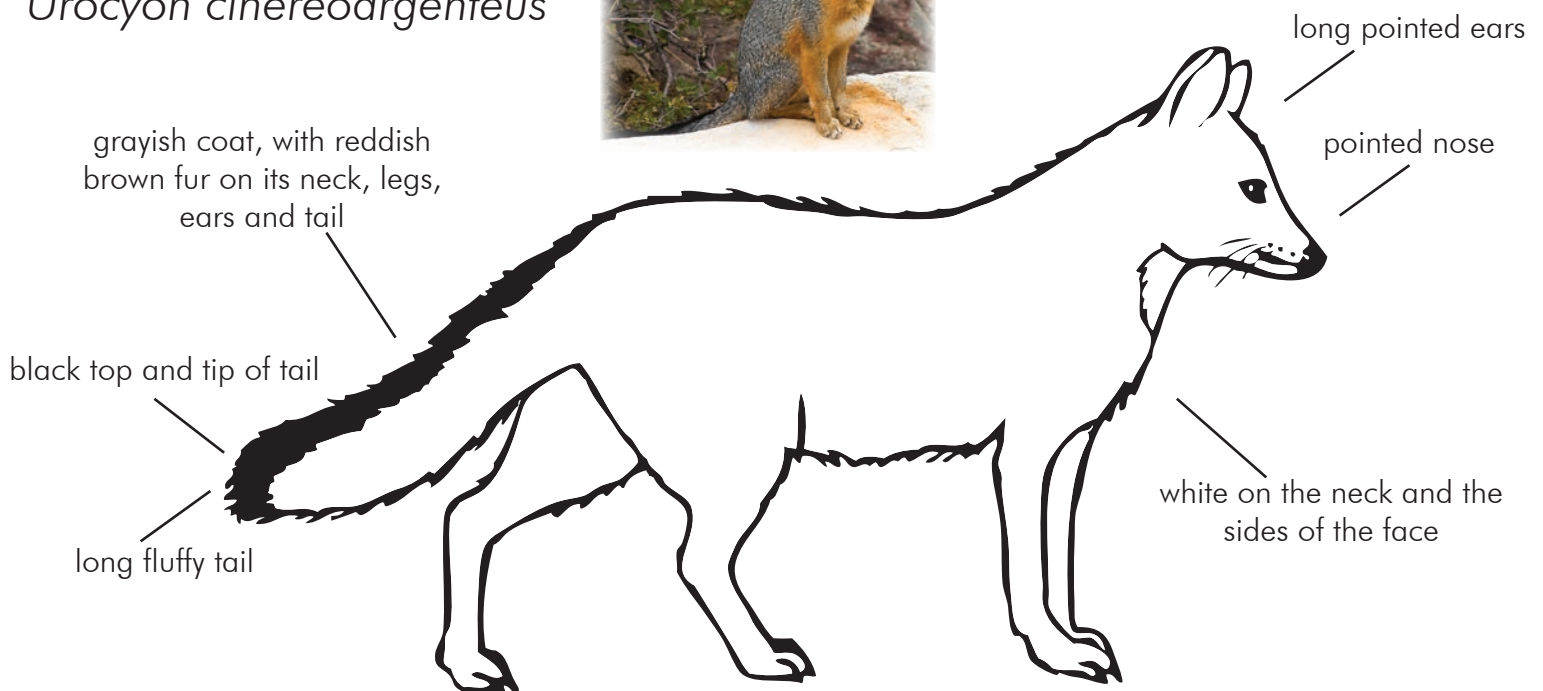


Image © Sheri Amsel, www.exploringnature.org
Gray fox by James Marvin Phelps



Foxes in Texas

By Elanor Dean

Foxes live around the world in many different types of habitat from the snowy arctic to the hot desert and even in trees. Some foxes have even adapted to live in urban environments like our neighborhoods. There are three types of foxes that live in Texas: the swift or kit fox which lives in the north western part of the state, the red fox which lives in the eastern and central parts of the state, and the most common, the gray fox which is found statewide.

Swift or Kit Fox

This is the smallest fox that is found in Texas, about the same size as a house cat. They have yellowish-tan fur on their belly and grayish-tan hair on the rest of their body with a black-tipped tail. They are mainly meat-eaters or carnivores and are nocturnal or come out at night to hunt their prey. They mostly hunt small rodents and rabbits, but they will eat other small animals such as birds, lizards, amphibians, insects and fish. They usually live in open desert or grassland habitats and during the day they sleep underground in dens.



Kit Fox

Red Fox

The red fox is the largest fox in Texas and is what most people think of when picturing a fox. Red foxes have red-orange fur with white on their snout and chest with a white-tipped tail and black hair on their ears and legs. Red foxes are not **native** to Texas, which means they have not always lived here, but were



Red Fox

brought here from Europe. They are found in woodland habitats and also in places near humans such as farms and neighborhoods. Red foxes are omnivores and will eat whatever they can find including rodents, rabbits, vegetables, worms and even garbage and pet food.

Gray Fox

The gray fox is the most common fox in Texas, found statewide. They have gray hair on their back and a black tip on their tail, and they also have reddish hair on their chest, legs and ears. Gray foxes are found in different habitats but are commonly found in places with trees like a forest. The reason they need to live somewhere with trees is because they are **arboreal**. This means that they can climb and live in trees. Gray foxes are one of only two members of the canine or dog family that can climb trees. They will den in trees and other places like underground burrows or between gaps in rocky places. Like the red fox, they are omnivores and will eat different foods like rabbits, fruit and insects.



Gray Fox



Red and Gray Fox

Foxes act like cats and have some of the same adaptations, but they are actually in the **canine** family like dogs. Like cats, they use their long tail to balance; this is very important for the gray fox when moving along tree branches. One difference between cats and dogs are their claws. Cats have claws that can completely **retract** but dogs do not. Foxes are in the middle because their claws can partly retract. This means that their claws can partly come back in like a cat's claws and are not out all the time like other members of the dog family. This makes it very helpful for gray foxes to climb trees. They also have sensitive **whiskers** like cats to feel



their way around at night. Another characteristic that is like cats is their hunting style. They hunt alone and quietly stalk their prey.



Swift Fox

Foxes are well known as sneaky or tricky animals. Think about Swiper from Dora who likes to steal things. Foxes are very smart animals and will eat food that is easiest to find. They steal eggs from nests and will even steal chickens or rabbits away from farms to eat. They are usually asleep in their dens during the day, so people do not see them when they are hunting at night.

Foxes can make lots of different sounds including a bark, growl, whine and yelp. The different sounds they make are to speak with each other and other animals in their habitat. They also have a great sense of hearing. Look at how large their ears are. That is a clue that they are great at listening for prey and predators that might want to eat them.

Depending on the type, foxes live anywhere from three to 10 years. Gray foxes usually live to be 10 years old. They can have anywhere from one to seven babies, or kits, in the spring time, usually an average of three to four kits per litter. Foxes are mammals, so kits will live in the den with



Gray Fox Kits

their mother for the first few months and will drink their mother's milk. After about three months they will come out of the dens and learn to hunt for their own food by watching their mother. The kits are born in the spring and will stay together until fall when they will go out into the world on their own.



Red Fox

Foxes are very interesting animals and we can do different things to help them. One way to keep foxes from coming into our neighborhoods is to make sure trash cans have a lid and that pet food is brought inside at night. Even though it is neat to see foxes in our neighborhoods, they are much better living in the wild. You can even help gray fox habitat by recycling paper so fewer trees are cut down. Next time you are outside in a park, remember to look up, because if you are lucky, you might see a fox up in the trees.



Gray Fox

WORD BANK

- arboreal** – an animal that lives or moves around in trees
- canine** – related to dogs
- native** – having always lived in a place
- retract** – to draw back in
- whiskers** – long hairs around the nose of some animals to help them feel

Sources: The Mammals of Texas by David J. Schmidly
 Photos by Wikimedia Commons: Bettina Arrigoni, BLM, California Department of Water Resources, Peter G. Trimming, Stephen Rahn, USFWS, Zion National Park

Fox Word Search

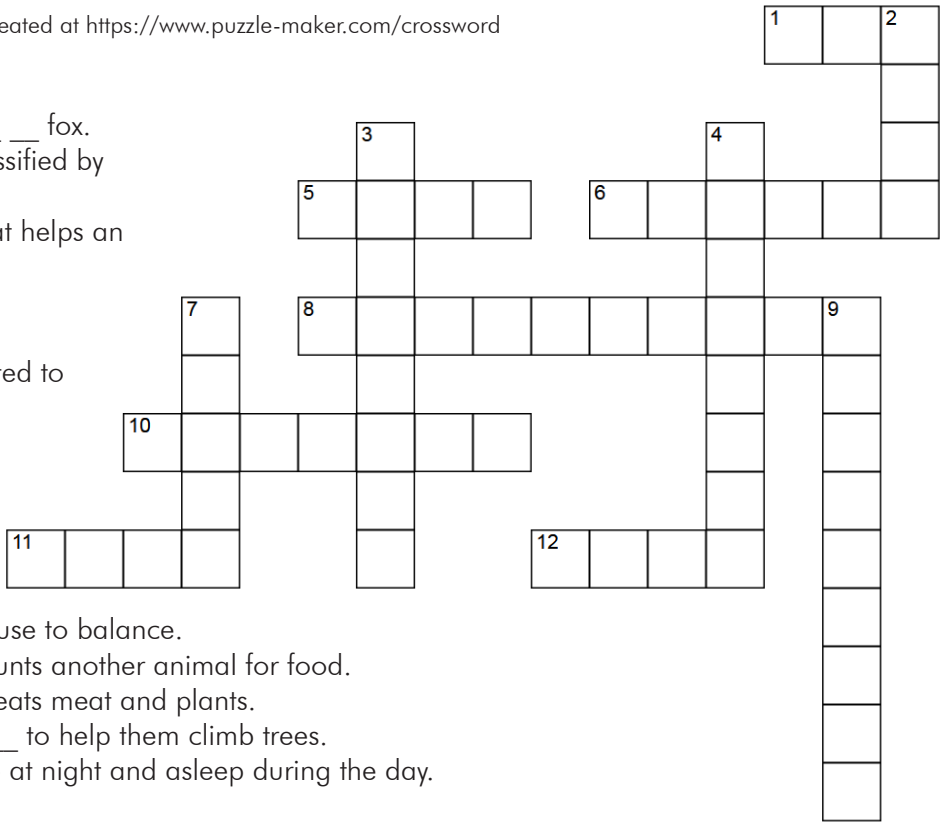
Puzzle image created at <https://www.puzzle-maker.com/crossword>

ACROSS:

1. A young fox is called a _____.
5. The most common fox in Texas is the _____ fox.
6. Foxes are in the _____ group, classified by having hair and feeding their young milk.
8. An _____ is a trait that helps an animal survive in its environment.
10. The place an animal lives is known as its _____.
11. Foxes act like cats, but they are actually related to _____.
12. An arboreal animal lives in a _____.

DOWN:

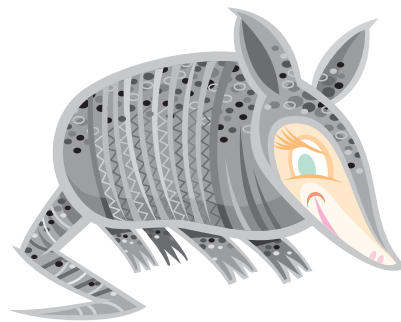
2. Foxes have a long fluffy _____ that they use to balance.
3. A _____ is an animal that hunts another animal for food.
4. An _____ is an animal that eats meat and plants.
7. Gray foxes have long and sharp _____ to help them climb trees.
9. A _____ animal is awake at night and asleep during the day.



Nancy's Corner



Draw a gray fox's arboreal habitat:



What is something else you learned about foxes?

List two things that foxes eat:

Youth Education Programs

Discovery Trunks

- * 2-week reservations
- * Seven wildlife topics
- * Hands-on materials and lessons
- * TEKS aligned for Grades K-8



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Trinity River Project

- * Study along the Trinity River
- * Water quality testing and analysis
- * Hands-on, inquiry-based learning
- * TEKS aligned for Grades 4-12



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