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Controlling Vertebrate Damage: Gray Fox, Red Fox, Coyote  
Michigan State University  
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Glenn Dudderar. Extension Wildlife Species  
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# CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-873

April 1977

## *gray fox, red fox coyote*

*(Urocyon cinereoargenteus, Vulpus fulva and  
Canis latrans)*

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

By GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

THESE WILD CANINES play a valuable role in the natural environment, but unfortunately, many people want them destroyed simply because they are predators.

Sportsmen often think that the predator destruction is an efficient way to increase game. Any temporary increase that might result from the control of these predators rarely, if ever, justifies the cost, especially when the creation of habitat required by game is a far more efficient and effective method of increasing game populations.

When, however, foxes or coyotes prey on domestic livestock and poultry, damage control is desired and is usually justifiable.

### POPULATION REDUCTION

#### Shooting

Foxes and coyotes can be enticed within gun range by using a predator call. These are available in most sporting goods stores or through sporting goods catalogs. Predator calls are not difficult to learn to use, but instruction from an experienced individual or from instructional records, plus practice, will greatly increase proficiency.

When calling predators, it is extremely important to select an area where the predators are known to frequent. It is also vital that the caller sit, not stand, concealed among bushes or tall grass, in front of a large rock or at the base of a tree. Camouflage is extremely helpful; and when snow is on the ground, a white parka, poncho or coveralls are almost essential.

If foxes or coyotes are within hearing range of the call, they will usually respond within a few minutes. However, it is usually best to try for at least 30 minutes. Calling should be frequent enough to entice the animal, but not so frequent as to permit him to pinpoint the source of the calling while outside gun range. For example, do not call when an animal is approaching your

position. If it hesitates, a few soft but desperate sounding calls should be given to entice it closer. Remember, the animal is looking for the source of the call, and the slightest movement may scare it off.

Another calling location, if desired, should be at least a mile away in open country and at least one-half mile away in timber country. Always select a site that is downwind from the direction in which you expect the predator to come. In open country, where legal, a rifle such as a .220 or a .243 caliber is most effective. In timber country, a shotgun is usually better than a rifle.

#### Den Hunting

Foxes and coyotes usually raise pups in dens between April 15 and June 15. Coyotes usually dig their own dens; foxes may simply enlarge woodchuck burrows. However, on occasion, both animals will use natural den sites or artificial ones such as culverts, brush piles and deserted structures. Sites such as wash outs, hillsides, bluffs and ditch or drain banks are more commonly selected.

Be on the lookout also for well-beaten paths that may lead directly to the den. Once the den site is located, the pups can be dug out and destroyed. Loose hair and small balls of fur in the soil at the mouth of the den are good evidence of pups within.

If the den can be located from a distance, it is often desirable to leave the den site and return in the early evening with a firearm, since there is a chance that the adults can also be killed at this time. Remember, if you approach a den too closely, the female will often move her pups to another den.

As an alternative, set steel traps at each side of the den mouth and directly in the entrance. See the section on trapping for proper trap placement. Bait is not required when trapping at the den site.

#### Trapping

Because foxes and coyotes have an excellent sense of smell and learn from experience, trapping requires extra precautions, but is not difficult if these precautions are strictly observed. No. 1½ or No. 2 smooth-jawed steel traps are best for foxes, and No. 3 is best for coyotes. Also, traps with offsets on the jaws that prevent them from completely closing will increase trapping success because the offset prevents the trap jaws from breaking bones, permitting the animal to escape. In addition, these traps usually allow animals unintentionally caught in the trap to be released unharmed.

Traps do not require prior special treatment, but should be free of strong human odor, oil or grease. The easiest way to clean traps is to boil them for 20 minutes in clean water, and then handle only when wearing gloves.

You will need these materials for fox and coyote trapping: knapsack, gloves, pieces of cloth (6 in. x 6 in.), trap stakes or drag hooks, hatchet or small mallet, bait jar and bait, sifting screen, traps, trowel, scent lure, ground cloth or tarpaulin.

Locate an area frequented by the animal, or trap at the damage site. One of the most effective trapping methods in such locations is the dirt hole or buried bait trap set. This is an imitation of a place where a fox or coyote has buried a piece of food to eat later.

Once you have selected the approximate trap site, stay as far away from it as possible but close enough so that you can spread your ground cloth or tarpaulin up to the trap site. This procedure enables you to approach the site without leaving your scent on the ground. If the site is along a travel way, the ground cloth should extend from the trap site across the travel way to your approach point.

Using a small trowel, dig a small hole 4 to 6 in. deep. Place the soil from this

bait hole on the ground cloth or tarpaulin. Make another hole 4 to 6 in. in front of the bait hole, large enough for the trap. This trap hole should be deep enough to accommodate the trap, trap stake or drag hook, and trap chain so that the top of the trap can be lightly covered with dirt and keep the ground even. Soil excavated from this hole should be placed on the ground cloth.

If a drag hook is used, lay it along an edge of the trap hole. Place the trap chain in the center of the hole and set the trap over the top of the chain. If the trap is to be staked down, slip the stake through the ring of the trap chain and drive it into the earth in the trap hole. Place the trap directly over the top of the chain and stake. Although most trappers stake traps down, a drag hook is usually better. It prevents the animal from obtaining enough leverage to pull free.

Once the set trap is placed in the excavation, cover it with a piece of cloth or wax paper to prevent soil from jamming the trap mechanism. Cover the

trap by sifting the soil from the ground cloth onto the trap to a depth of at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. of soil. Remove all soil lumps, stones and sticks from the surface above the trap.

Place a piece of meat bait approximately the size of a walnut in the bait hole and a few drops of scent lure on the edge of the bait hole.

Collect all tools and extra materials on the ground cloth or tarpaulin. As you back away from the trap, roll up the ground cloth and carry it away. Dispose of extra soil, leaves, rocks, twigs, etc. a long distance from the trap.

When the soil is frozen, it will be necessary to carry enough soil to bury the trap. Unfrozen soil can usually be found on south-facing road cuts or taken from ant hills. Treat this material with a mixture of 50% glycerin and 50% water scented with the scent lure so it will not freeze once the trap is covered.

When trapping in snow, use the same procedures with certain modifications. Since the trap cannot be staked down in the snow, fasten the trap chain to a

heavy drag such as a large branch or small log and bury in the snow. Second, place a piece of plastic wrap or wax-paper both above and below the trap to keep it from freezing in place. Finally, tie the bait to the trap pan and bury it in the snow. The fox or coyote will get caught when digging for the bait.

If the bait hole set is not used, then it is essential to place traps along the animal runways, den entrances or any frequently travelled route. This is a blind set. Blind sets are most effective along runways, especially if placed adjacent to clumps of grass, brush, sticks, logs or rocks that the fox or coyote normally jumps over. Correct and careful placement will assure that when the animal jumps over the obstruction, it cannot avoid stepping into the trap.

Because fox and coyote furs have commercial value, a landowner may be able to locate a trapper to trap animals on his property. **A trapping license is required to trap on another person's property.**