

November 15, 2025 [Columnist](#) Robert Miller:

Gray foxes have been in Connecticut for millennia, but few people have seen them



Gray foxes are native to Connecticut and have been here longer than their red counterparts, but are more elusive. Courtesy of Paul Fusco, Connecticut DEEP

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy white dog.

The gray fox climbed a tree like a cat.

It's unlikely, however, you've seen this elusive, nocturnal forest-dwelling fox. Unlike their white dog-jumping, chicken coop-raiding, equestrian-chased distant cousin, [the red fox](#) (who can be brownish) — gray foxes tend to stay clear of humans.

"You see them very sporadically," said James Fischer, research director at the 4,000-acre White Memorial Conservation Center in Litchfield. "In Connecticut, we don't see them that often."

Cathy Hagadorn, executive director of the Deer Pond Farm nature sanctuary in Sherman – owned by the Connecticut Audubon Society – said she's seen a multitude of fox tracks cutting across the muddy trails at the 835-acre preserve.

But a gray fox? "I've never seen one," she said.

But they are native to the state and have been here longer than their red counterparts.

"They live under our noses," said Jason Hawley, a wildlife biologist with the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. For how long, however, isn't clear.

Gray foxes are now in marked decline in the Midwest and the Southeast – victims of a host of issues – loss of habitat, disease, harassment by coyotes.

The [DEEP is now trying to establish a baseline of the gray fox population](#) in the state so that it can begin a multi-year study to learn if that decline is happening here as well.

For Hawley, the gray fox is worth the work. "They're my favorite animal in Connecticut," he said.

Toward this end, the DEEP is asking anyone who has seen a gray fox to report it. People can do so at the DEEP gray fox website at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/fact-sheets/gray-fox>.

IDs can be tricky, however. Gray foxes are silver-gray with some russet coloring. Red foxes are red, except when they are brown or gray, black, or even white.

But gray fox have black-tipped tails, red foxes usually have white-tipped ones, and black legs. Hawley said, for him, the best mark to look for is the black lines on a gray fox's face. If you get a chance to see that face.

The scientific name of the gray fox is *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*, which means, basically, silver tailed dog. They are a different branch of the canid family than red fox — *Vulpes vulpes* – and the two species do not interbreed. Gray foxes' closest relatives are the East Asian raccoon dog and the African bat-eared fox.

The fossil record shows gray foxes were in North America as far back as 3.6 million years ago, along with giant sloths and elephants. They migrated to the eastern side of the continent around 950-1250 CE during what's called the Medieval Climate Warming Anomaly.

Over time, they evolved into the only member of the canid family – dogs, wolves, coyotes, foxes, jackals – that have retractable claws like a cat and can climb trees. A common name for them is tree fox.

They are nocturnal, solitary hunters. They mate for life, and the males help raise the kits. Hawley said gray foxes can have extended families, with daughters and sisters pitching into help with the young.

Gray fox are strictly forest-dwellers who shy away from humans. That differentiates them from the very adaptable red fox who are creatures of fields and forest edges, suburbs and cities.

"They can live on golf courses," Hawley said of the red rovers.

Hawley said gray foxes are also non-confrontational – they'll go out on a limb rather than fight.

They have enemies to avoid. Coyotes are highly territorial and will drive them away. The growing bobcat population in Connecticut will kill kits, or even adults, for a meal. Cars will hit them.

They may also be prone to diseases like distemper. Forest fragmentation may be depriving them of suitable habitat.

They prefer brushy woods and young forests to Connecticut's mostly mature woods. Fischer said the White Memorial Conservation Center manages its property to create brushy habitat for New England cottontail rabbits. Gray foxes are showing up in them as well, he said.

Hawley said one of the reasons he likes gray foxes so much is that they've survived so many different adversities.

"They have so much going against them in Connecticut – bobcats, coyotes, humans, cars," he said.

So, Fischer said, when people see a gray fox – or any wildlife – they should try and understand where and how they're living here.

"Whatever it might be, it's telling us about that place," he said.

---Nov 15, 2025 [Robert Miller](#) Environmental Columnist

Robert Miller is a freelance columnist for Hearst Connecticut Media Group, covering the environment. He has been working as a reporter in western Connecticut since 1978. He has covered the environment for about half that time. In 2014, he retired from day-to-day reporting, but has continued to write a weekly column on the environment. He's a birder and a gardener and a bookworm who lives in the exurbs - the rural suburbs. He thinks the world we live in -- even his tiny corner -- is an endlessly fascinating place and he has been very lucky to write about it