



**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

# NEWS

FWP REGION 5 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings MT 59105

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**More swift foxes observed in Billings area; reporting urged**

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The swift fox is an elusive animal, but in recent years more sightings of these small, gray-red foxes with black-tipped tails have been reported in southcentral Montana.

In Montana, the swift fox is a species of concern managed through season quotas. But numbers are sparse in Region 5, so there is no hunting or trapping season here.

Swift foxes were once abundant on the Great Plains, but in the early 1900s numbers began to decline in response to government poisoning campaigns aimed at wolves, prairie dogs and ground squirrels. Swift foxes lost a prey source in prairie dogs and squirrels, and when wolves declined, they couldn't out-compete coyotes and red foxes for food. In 1969, Montana declared swift fox basically extinct locally. But due in part to transplant programs, sightings of swift foxes have increased in eastern and central Montana since the 1980s.

There is a substantial, stable population in north-central Montana, but it's spotty here.

FWP encourages people to report any live or road-killed sightings of swift foxes to the local biologist. A few reported sightings have happened near Shepherd.

To report sightings, however, people need to be able to tell the difference between swift foxes, red foxes and coyotes. Swift foxes are about the size of a house cat, smaller than red foxes and only about a fifth the size of coyotes. Red foxes are red, with some variations, and have white-tipped tails. Swift foxes have grayish-red fur and a black-tipped tail. Coyotes can have similar coloring and tail markings, but again are much larger.

Juvenile coyotes could resemble swift foxes certain times of the year and while coyotes and red foxes can be shot or trapped in Region 5, swift foxes cannot.

Non-game Biologist Brandi Skone notes that swift foxes also often have a darker, teardrop-like pattern descending from their inner eye alongside the nose.

Swift foxes are year-round residents, inhabiting prairies and arid plains. Largely nocturnal, swift foxes can range over several square kilometers a night. They breed from late December to early March, with a single litter of three to six pups born late March to early May. Young are raised in an underground den, emerging in early June and dispersing in late summer or early fall.

FWP wildlife biologist Megan O'Reilly urges recreationists and others to contact the Billings FWP office if they see live or road-killed swift fox in the area. She can be reached at 406-247-2966 or at [moreilly@mt.gov](mailto:moreilly@mt.gov).

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