

Why did the Red Wolf Become Endangered?

All canines have been feared and hunted by humans. Unfortunately, the gray wolf and red wolf have also suffered from human expansion and destruction of the animals' natural habitats. The gray wolf and red wolf are currently on the Federal Endangered Species List. While there are few gray wolves left in the mainland United States, there are about 50,000 in Canada and Alaska. Currently, only a handful of red wolves are living in the wild where they are released. The coyote has adapted and thrived near human populations, consequently its numbers have increased.

How did the Coyote-Wolf Hybrid Come to be?

Wild canines observed in the Southeast in large numbers into the 1960's were not true red wolves, but a red wolf-coyote hybrid. When the red wolf population became limited, coyotes moved into their territory. Some red wolves were forced to crossbreed with coyotes, creating a coyote-wolf hybrid, almost indistinguishable in appearance from a true red wolf. The public (and some experts) believed the red wolf existed in large numbers. Some members of the scientific community felt this hybridization jeopardized the survival of the red wolf species. In a controversial program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service trapped the last 40 by 1980. Further breeding in captivity revealed some of these hybrids and only 14 true red wolves remained, all in captivity. The red wolf was then declared officially extinct in the wild. This was the first time drastic measures were taken to save a species from extinction. Since then, this method has been used on the California condor and the black-footed ferret in order to establish captive breeding programs for these species.

Photos by Land Between the Lakes Staff

Explore the Nature Station

3146 Silver Trail Road | Cadiz, KY 42211

270-924-2299

Come and visit our resident red wolves. This is the only place in the Land Between the Lakes that you will find them. They are shy, but are generally visible from the observation trail .



Find more information at:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

www.fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/mammals/red-wolf

National Wildlife Federation

www.nfw.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Mammals/Red-Wolf

USDA Forest Service

Land Between the Lakes

National Recreation Area

800.525.7077 or 270.924.2000

www.landbetweenthe lakes.us



Official website



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Red Wolf

Canis rufus

~ Fact Sheet ~

Land Between the Lakes

National Recreation Area

Western Kentucky and Tennessee



Red wolves live at Land Between the Lakes, but only at the Nature Station. At one time, only 14 red wolves existed, all in captivity. Descendants of the original 14 wolves now number more than 250. Because of the captive breeding program efforts, those numbers are expected to grow. The program not only saved the red wolf from extinction, but actually reintroduced the species to portions of the original range. As a result, public understanding of the wolf and support for breeding and reintroduction are on the rise. Follow the red wolf from the website www.redwolves.com for more information.



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

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Red Wolf Fun Facts

Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area

- The red wolf is smaller than the gray wolf and larger than the coyote. It generally weighs 45-80 lbs. In contrast, a coyote with shorter legs and a narrower muzzle, weighs 25-50 lbs. Gray wolves are bigger weighing 70-120 lbs. A red wolf's life span, similar to large dogs, averages 7-10 years. Although they may live to be as old as 14 in captivity.
- Red wolves reach sexual maturity in two years. They produce one litter of pups per year, in April or May, averaging 2-4 pups per litter. By comparison, dogs reach sexual maturity before one year and can produce two litters of pups per year. Also, all dogs curl their tails, while wolves and coyotes do not.
- In the wild, a red wolf eats almost anything that is readily available, including deer, raccoons, rodents, insects, and even vegetation.
- Red wolves do not hunt in packs. The larger gray wolf feeds on large game and hunts in packs to catch prey. The red wolf feeds on much smaller animals and usually hunts in pairs or small family units. Consequently, red wolves pose little threat to livestock or deer.
- In 1984, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums implemented an integrated captive breeding program for the red wolf. The program not only saved the red wolf from extinction, but actually reintroduced the species to portions of its original range. This is the first time a species that was officially extinct in the wild has been successfully reintroduced. The reintroduction was accomplished through careful breeding in captivity, carefully controlled releases of animals into suitable territories, and public education.
- There are no red wolves in Land Between the Lakes. A plan to release wolves was considered in 1983, but because of opposition from the public, the plan was not approved. The Land Between the Lakes area probably had a population of red wolves at some time in its history and currently has the appropriate habitat and food resources to support the red wolf, but public concern and a rapidly growing coyote population make reintroduction unlikely at this time.
- Red wolves are naturally shy and will avoid humans whenever possible. There has never been a single reported case of a red wolf attacking a human. In addition, the release sites are carefully chosen to prevent possible problems. Experts monitor the wolves with radio transmitters attached to their collars to be sure newly released animals adjust to their surroundings.



Historical Range of the Red Wolf



- The situation remains extremely fragile and a full recovery will take many years to be achieved. Constant management and monitoring most likely will always be necessary. While captive breeding can help maintain their numbers, some experts fear that after several generations in captivity, the wolves will lose some of their behavioral characteristics necessary for survival in the wild.
 - Red wolves are selective about their mates and generally mate for life.
 - The possibility of newly released red wolves interbreeding with coyotes is still a concern.
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