

or Coyote, and had an unusual gait. When it came to the edge of the summer fallow 150 yards away it stopped and looked back, showing a big, round, fat face. It then leaped about 20 feet over the summer fallow into the weeds and leaped off into the brush. It was yellow-tan in colour, longer and slinkier than a deer and when it leaped its long tail could be seen. It was about 6 feet or more long, 200-250 pounds in weight and 2 feet high to its shoulder.

The next morning, Mr. McLean was cultivating the summer fallow when he again clearly observed a Cougar. This one was shorter and chunkier than the other, had a lower belly and was about 4 feet, 6 inches long, including its long tail. It kept circling through some tall grass and on one occasion stood on a knoll and appeared to be watching something. In the afternoon at the same place Mr. McLean saw first one Cougar kitten and then a second about a 100 yards away. He drove his discer at them several times trying to kill them. He got very close but was afraid to get off the tractor because he didn't know what the female Cougar would do. He was within a few yards of the kittens on several occasions and had an uninterrupted view of them. The kittens were larger than a house cat, had long tails and seemed greyish in colour. They went into a slough and then into the bush. In

the field there was an unused Badger hole in the entrance of which were found bones and feathers. The hole appeared to have been enlarged and grass had grown into the entrance forming a bed 4 or 5 feet long. Mr. McLean stated that this area normally has a high density of deer but that recently they had largely deserted the place.

Nearby, on the George Godomier farm, a cow died of natural causes and was left on the side of a field. When it was examined later, it was found to have had the hide peeled off and the entire meat had been eaten in much shorter time than is usually the case. (This is typical Cougar family feeding sign.) Mrs. Godomier said that in 1971 she was awakened one night by blood-curdling screams and thought her dog had been killed. George Godomier recalled than an old trapper who lived all his life in this area and who died some 15 years ago, had said that there were Cougars living in the area.

The above reports, which in my opinion are reliable, provide additional evidence of the existence of this rare animal in the province. Others who may be so fortunate as to sight this species are urged to record and report their observations in detail.

¹White, Thomas. 1967, History of the Cougars in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 25:84-89.

RED FOXES

Make a Comeback in Central Alberta After 30 Years

BY DICK DEKKER*

J. Dewey Soper gives the distribution of the Red Fox as covering all of Alberta except the south-central and southeastern region, which was formerly the habitat of the Kit Fox.² Since 1959 I have made enquiries about the local occurrence of Red Foxes in the southern half of the province from numerous naturalists, park wardens, forest

rangers, farmers, ranchers, trappers and outfitters. It appears that during the past 40 years some significant changes have taken place. From the thirties to the late sixties, foxes were virtually absent from all of central Alberta. Recently, they are staging a comeback.

The following are my conclusions about the regional status of the Red Fox during the previous decade. It was:

1. Scarce in Jasper and Banff National Parks. (Soper reported it scarce in the mountains.)

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2. Absent in the foothills west of Calgary, where it was common 30 years earlier.

3. Absent or scarce in the Edson and Whitecourt Forests, where trappers reported it numerous 30 years earlier. (A few reports persisted from the Swan Hills.)

4. Absent or scarce in the parkland and agricultural areas west and north of Edmonton.

5. Absent or scarce from Edmonton east to Saskatchewan and south to the International Boundary, with the exception of the Milk River area.

While cyclic fluctuation is a characteristic of some North American fox populations, their absence for three or four decades in some areas of former abundance in Alberta is a mystery. The rabies scare and the saturation poison campaigns of the early fifties may have been a decisive factor locally. Also, competition from Coyotes, which were common in central and southern Alberta during the past 40 years, may have played a role. Equally puzzling is the rather sudden re-appearance of Red Foxes in some of their former range and the expansion into new territory, a phenomenon of the past 5 years.

Red Foxes made their first gains in the extreme south of the province. From the Milk River Valley they extended their range northward into the irrigated farm lands around Lethbridge and Taber. In 1968 a pair was reported denning near Balzac, just north of Calgary. At least one animal was shot the following winter by someone on a snowmobile. In 1969 and 1970 several foxes fell victim to snowmobilers in the Camrose area, and one was gunned down just 10 miles south of Edmonton, where another fox became a traffic fatality. The previous summer a fox had been seen crossing a field on the southern edge of the city. In the next 2 years no further reports from that locality came to my attention.

During the same period, foxes were establishing themselves in the eastern parts of Alberta. There were reports from Cold Lake, Bonneyville, Provost and Cypress Hills. Several were poisoned near Acadia Valley. In August

of 1972 I was guided to four fox dens which had been used recently. One had been dug into a haystack on the edge of a farm yard, another in a ditch along a country road, while two others were situated in fields well away from cover and within 100 yards of well-used roads. In that area, 50 miles east of Edmonton, lifetime residents were seeing their first foxes.

By 1972 foxes had spread westward. They were seen near Elk Point, Warwick, Provost, Lavoy, Mannville and Tofield. North and west of Edmonton foxes were recorded from Swan Hills, Winnegami, Long Lake and Seibert Lake.

It appears that the new breed of fox is more adaptable than its predecessor. It seems quite able to cope with human domination of the land. In recent times foxes have also expanded their range in southern Saskatchewan and in the northwestern United States.¹

In Alberta, one can speculate that the recent population expansion of the Red Fox is directly related to the emergence of over-snow vehicles and their adverse impact on Coyotes. With a lessening of competition from the latter, which were hunted down mercilessly by snowmobile operators, the fox found a place to live. The mis-use of snowmobiles may have had a beneficial side effect for me, personally, for on November 18, 1972, one of my fondest wildlife dreams was realized when I observed a Red Fox for the first time here in central Alberta.

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¹Rue, L. 1969. The world of the Red Fox. Lippincott.

²Soper, J. D. 1964. Mammals of Alberta. Queen's Printer, Edmonton, Alberta.