

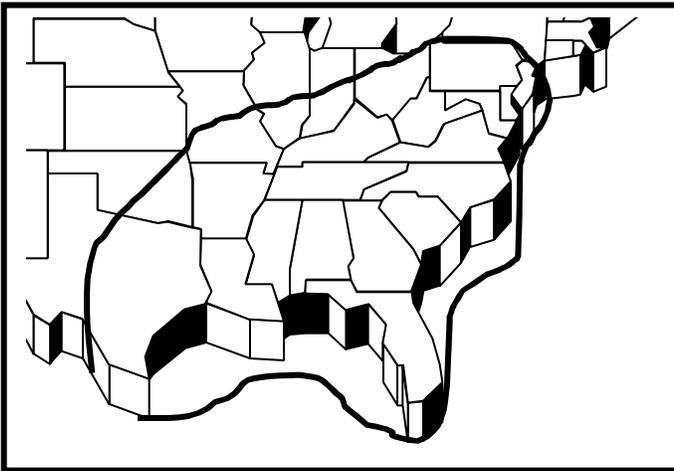
# WHAT IS A RED WOLF?

## DESCRIPTION

The red wolf, *Canis rufus*, is one of two species of wolves in North America. The other is the gray wolf, *Canis lupus*. Red wolves are smaller than gray wolves, but they are larger than coyotes. They average 24 to 30 inches in height at the shoulder and weigh from 42 to 84 pounds. Females are usually slightly smaller than the males.

Red wolves are mostly brown or buff in color with some black and reddish hairs mixed in. Often their coats have rich chestnut or reddish tones on the head, ears, and on the backs of the legs. The head is broader than a coyote's but narrower than a gray wolf's. The red wolf's most distinguishing characteristics are the long ears and the long slim legs.

## HABITAT AND RANGE



ORIGINAL RANGE OF THE RED WOLF

Originally, the red wolf roamed as a top predator throughout the eastern United States from Florida to central Texas and as far north as Pennsylvania. Some biologists believe that it lived as far north as

southeastern Canada. The red wolf lived on the prairies, in forests and brush, on the coastal plains, and in swamps. By the 1920's, however, the red wolf, like its relative the gray wolf, had been extirpated in most of its range. Indiscriminate killing and large-scale predator control programs combined with destruction of habitat sealed the doom of this unique species. Ranchers and farmers believed that red wolves caused widespread cattle losses. In addition, logging, mineral exploration, road development, and drainage projects destroyed the red wolf's habitat. As forests were cleared in Texas and Oklahoma, coyotes expanded eastward, establishing themselves where wolves had once lived. The few remaining red wolves, failing to find mates of their own species, began to interbreed with the coyotes, further accelerating their rapid decline. By 1970, fewer than 100 red wolves remained in the entire United States. This remnant population was confined to a small area of coastal Louisiana and Texas. By 1980, the red wolf was considered to be extinct in the wild.

## PACK STRUCTURE AND PREY

Red wolf packs are smaller than those of the gray wolf. The pack is a family group consisting of the breeding pair, the young of the current year, and some offspring of previous years. Red wolves mate in February or March, and four or five pups are born in March or April. Like gray wolves, red wolves maintain a strict hierarchy of dominant and subordinate animals within the pack. This enables the pack to function as a unit. Red wolves hunt individually, in pairs, and possibly in packs. In northeastern North Carolina, most of their diet consists of white-tailed deer, raccoons, rabbits, and rodents.