

THIS WEEK ON THE LLANO ESTACADO

DECEMBER 7-11-2009



Gray foxes (always have black tips to their tails) and are often found in town. They are the only canid (dog-like animal) that can climb, so they are often seen on top of fences, houses, and in trees.

Gray foxes are omnivores. Besides mice and small rats, they eat fruit, insects, bird eggs, and dog

food left outside.

In February, their strange quavery mating calls can be heard — it sounds like a small child screeching after he or she is hurt! Females dig under dumpsters and backyard sheds to create dens for their young. In July the parents wean the young by leaving them behind, so for a few weeks two to four “kits” will travel together until they find a new territory in which to live.

There are probably more gray foxes per square mile in town than there is out in the mesquite brushland and draw pocket forests where they also live. There is more food to be found in town. They often leave “scent stations,” by defecating at the same spot for a week or more. This is one of their most important means of communication, for it tells all the foxes in the neighborhood about the food supplies in that area.

TEACHER AND STUDENT CHALLENGE; Try to find the droppings of the fox that lives near your school. Look for droppings (scat) less than two inches long and about as big around as a high lighter pen. The scat will often have bug parts, plant seeds, and some hair. **Foxes almost never hurt pets, but they sometimes do have rabies, and if you see a fox drooling or stumbling, call Animal Control immediately.**