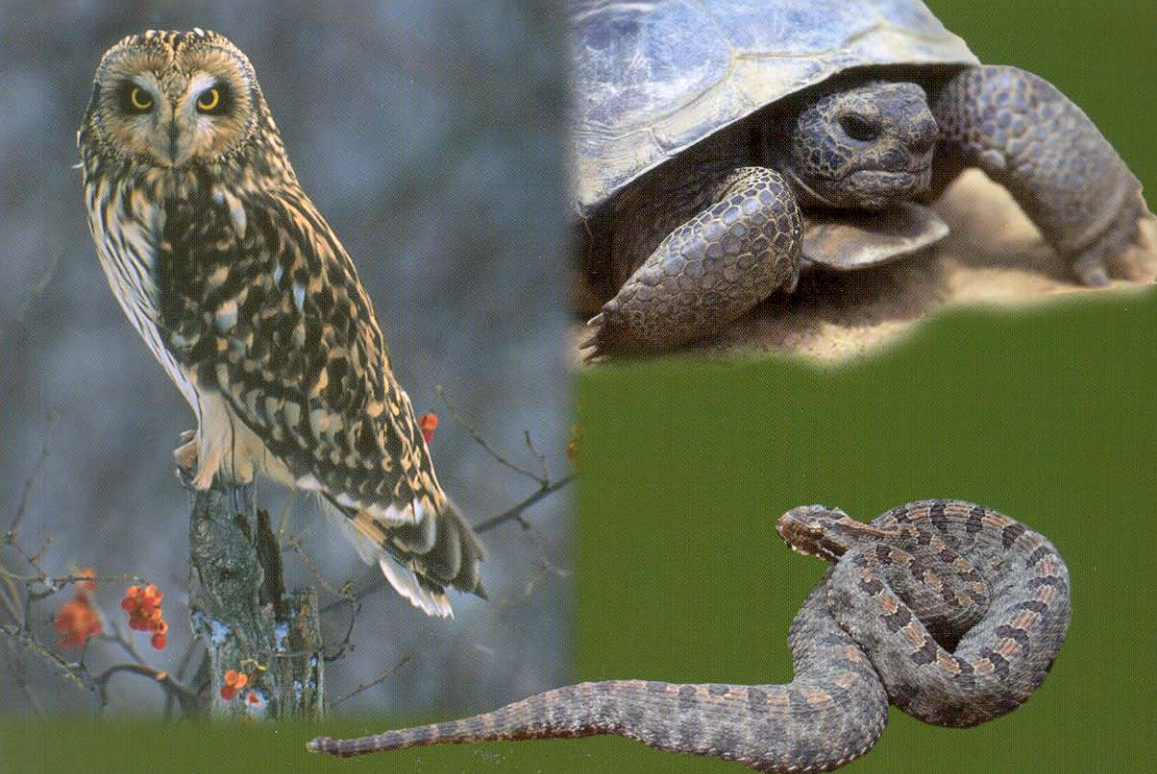




ALABAMA WILDLIFE

VOLUME THREE

**Imperiled Amphibians,
Reptiles, Birds,
and Mammals**

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RED WOLF

Canis rufus Audubon and Bachman

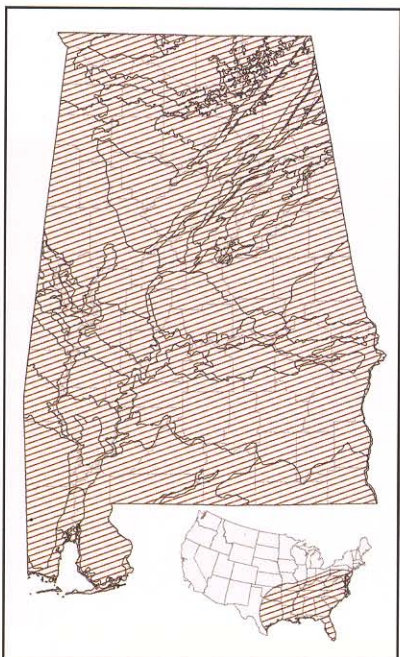
OTHER NAMES. Florida Red Wolf, Mississippi Valley Red Wolf (Young and Goldman 1944, Howell 1921).

DESCRIPTION. Highly variable in morphology; similar to gray wolf and coyote in many characteristics. Red wolf usually larger (adult length=130-170 cm [50-70 in.]; weight=16-41 kg [35-90 lb.]) than coyote and smaller than gray wolf, but general form and color often overlap among these species (Young and Goldman 1944, Paradiso and Nowak 1972, Carbyn 1987, Choate *et al.* 1994). Hybridization with coyote may have contributed to decimation of red wolf, but this has not been verified (McCarley 1962; Paradiso 1968; Paradiso and Nowak 1972, 1982; Choate *et al.* 1994). Pelage coarse; tail bushy and tipped with black; muzzle, ears, nape, and outer surfaces of legs tawny; back appears blackish with cinnamon-buff and tawny hair interspersed with gray and black; nose, throat, and belly whitish. Mostly black individuals with white on feet, chin, and throat reported in some areas (Carbyn 1987, Choate *et al.* 1994). Two subspecies may have occurred in Alabama (Florida red wolf, *C. r. floridanus*; Mississippi Valley red wolf, *C. r. gregoryi*) (Hall 1981).

DISTRIBUTION. Once occurred in the Mississippi River Valley and associated drainages, northward into Illinois and Indiana, southward through southern Missouri, eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee to the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi, westward from the coastal region into central Texas, and eastward through Alabama to the Atlantic Coast in Georgia and Florida (Paradiso and Nowak 1972, 1982; Hall 1981). No native wild populations presently exist, but the



Photo—Steve Masloiska/USFWS



species has been reintroduced into the wild with limited success on islands and select portions (*e.g.*, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, North Carolina) of the mainland in the southeastern United States (Choate *et al.* 1994). In 1921, reported as being on the verge of extinction in Alabama after apparently being found statewide initially. The last stronghold in Alabama was the rough, hilly region stretching from Walker County northwestward to Colbert County. Little is known about red wolves in Alabama, except they roamed in small groups and often fed on small domestic animals such as sheep, goats, pigs, and sometimes calves. One specimen from 19 kilometers (12 miles) south of Cherokee, Colbert County, was preserved (Howell 1921). Of the two subspecies that may have occurred in Alabama, *C. r. floridanus* is believed to have inhabited all of the state, except the southwestern portion, which may have been inhabited by *C. r. gregoryi* (Hall 1981).

HABITAT. Warm, moist, and densely vegetated habitats including pine forests and bottomland hardwood forests, as well as some parts of coastal prairies and marshes. Dens have been found in hollow logs, stumps, culverts, sand

knolls, and in banks of ditches. Entrances to dens generally are hidden from view by vines, brush, trees, and shrubs (Choate *et al.* 1994).

LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY. Most active at night; during day, may rest in weedy fields, tall grass, and clumps of brush. Mated pairs, sometimes with an extra male, usually travel together. Pairs usually travel around home range using established runways marked by scent posts and scratch marks. Packs of five to 11 individuals may form temporarily. Apparently is not a significant predator of big game or livestock; rabbits, rodents, and other small animals are most frequently taken. Breeding probably occurs late December to early March; gestation about 60 days; young born in April-May. Size of litters is two to 10 young, averaging seven. Young reach sexual maturity and begin breeding at about two years old. Lifespan unknown, but are susceptible to distemper, diseases, accidents, and they have numerous parasites, including hookworms and heartworms (Young and Goldman 1994; Paradiso and Nowak 1972, 1982; Carbyn 1987; Choate *et al.* 1994).

BASIS FOR STATUS CLASSIFICATION. Before extirpation from the southeastern United States, humans were the greatest threat through deliberate killing and habitat modification. Eradicated by trapping and poisoning throughout its distribution, but persisted until the 1970s in swampland of southern Louisiana. Presently exists in the southeastern United States only in captivity and in a few carefully monitored reintroduction sites (Choate *et al.* 1994). Listed as *endangered* by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1967 and as *an experimental, nonessential population* in North Carolina and Tennessee following reintroduction attempts in 1987.

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