Our vision is a San Francisco Bay Area Wildlife Corridor. UWRP notes that as Silicon Valley's human population, development, and sea level increases, it is of utmost importance that the wildlife thoroughfares are identified and protected, thus maintaining California's natural genetic diversity.

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**Gray Fox Report for February 2017**

*Respectfully Submitted by*  
William C. Leikam, Founder of the [Urban Wildlife Research Project (UWRP)](https://www.urbanwildliferesearch.org)

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**A New Gray Fox Chapter Begins**

With the untimely demise of the gray foxes at the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve, there are "no" foxes since the single fox referred to in the January issue of the Fox Report has not been seen for nearly two months now. Recently, however, I came across scat that suggested that either a gray fox is somewhere in the area or a coyote. The scat was larger than most gray fox scat and it consisted of fur with small seeds so that ruled out a pet dog. Size and contents made me think it might have been coyote, but then again, based on direct observation, I have seen rather large gray fox scat too.

I now have five sometimes six trail cameras in the field working to find a fox or foxes coming through during the night. One of those cameras is located in an area where multiple connection trails merge to form the central wildlife corridor at the baylands. There is a great deal of activity in this area. On Tuesday 02/28/2017 instead of just setting up the camera, I walked one of the trails and came upon two brush rabbits that instantly dashed away. Just a little further on I came upon the remnants of a rabbit killed within two to three days prior. This along with the scat strongly suggests the presence of a predator.

If this happens to be a gray fox in the area it may be single or it may have paired up with a mate. Young gray foxes born last April 2016 do not always pair-up during their first year but remain single. None-the-less they will often occupy and claim a region if they find one uninhabited, such as is the case at the baylands. This could be what is happening.

We found that with the gray fox die-off there was a sudden, and I do mean a sudden, explosion of especially field mice, but also woodrats, gophers as there are more mounds
showing up and somewhat with ground and tree squirrels as well. In the latter case although the trail cameras have picked up an increase in squirrels, an alternative explanation to this increase might be because the squirrels that were always there are becoming far more emboldened and show up in front of the trail cameras because the predators are gone.

Since gray foxes are the keystone species in most areas that they inhabit, they are the ones that maintain the balance in the ecosystem. The result of such a large die-off of gray foxes in a region may well create a trophic cascade that in the end turns the whole ecology of the environment upside down to where all wildlife in the region suffers. It is for this and several other reasons why it is important to document the re-population of the gray foxes at the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve.

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**General Health of the Gray Foxes**

*Unknown.*

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**Total Numbers Of Gray Foxes in the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve**

*There is possibly one or there may also be a coyote in the area.*

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**Update for the Urban Wildlife Research Project - Greg Kerekes & Bill Leikam**

As an update on events occurring with the Urban Wildlife Research Project:

1. Recently I was asked to contribute to a field guide book titled Canids of the World by Dr. Jose Castello. The Princeton University Press will publish it later this year.
2. Based on the die-off of the gray foxes, freelance journalist Tom Molanphy wrote an outstanding article. I highly recommend this article because it makes a very important statement about the relationship between corridors and the health of wildlife. [Death of Silicon Valley Grey Foxes Point to Urgent Need for Wildlife Corridors.](https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-40618502)
3. If you haven't had a chance to read at least some of the articles that have been written about our study of gray fox behavior and our corridor work, **click on these links as they will take you to the source**: [Bill Leikam - The Fox Guy](http://www.billyleikam.com) and [Greg Kerekes and UWRP](http://www.urbansources.org).
4. During the weekend of March 10, 2017, Greg and I presented our work at [Safari West](http://www.safaribest.com) just north-east of Santa Rosa, California.
5. In the spring, watch for a new article about our work with the gray foxes and the corridor connectivity tracking that Greg and I are doing. I will send out a notice when published.

To find out more about us, search Greg Kerekes, Bill Leikam - The Fox Guy, [Urban Wildlife Research Project, UWRP](http://www.urbansources.org), gray foxes, corridors, and more.
Permit Objectives

Within the permit that allows the Urban Wildlife Research Project to conduct its study of the behavior of the gray fox, the objectives covered are:

- **Monitoring of urban gray fox denning sites in Palo Alto Baylands.**

  This is being accomplished during the period when the gray foxes use a den site. It is one of the prime locations for gathering most of the behavioral data on the litter and on adults alike.

- **Assessment of status and population trends of Bayland's urban gray foxes.**

  See above - As of June 2015, it appears as though the number of gray foxes at the baylands has declined considerably. This brings up the question: As with coyotes that can regulate the number of pups born in a region, might also gray foxes do the same?

- **Identification of habitat features that promote the presence of urban gray foxes.**

  As stated in a previous gray fox report, there is a need to undertake some work to increase the habitat features required by the gray foxes and other wildlife in an area where a road was built that borders the saltwater channel. I asked construction supervisor Frank Muzzi about this and he felt that the old growth Coyote Bush would grow back within the coming year and therefore accomplish the same goal. After considering this and talking with people who know how to restore habitats, we need to assess what kinds of plants would grow best along the edge of the saltwater channel and alongside the marsh. The Alkaline Saltbush is one but there are probably others as well. We need to grow a permanent habitat that contains the corridors and plant it as soon as possible. We'll keep an eye on this as this is a critical link between the southern region of the baylands and the northern region.

- **Assessment of reproductive success and identification of factors that promote successful reproduction.**

  Last month I wrote that gray fox reproduction at the baylands appears to be holding steady with an average of 3.3 pups developing to maturity during the 2013 and 2014 seasons. As noted above, the 2015 season has fewer pups than in years past. **Solution?** Open up the pinch-point along Matadero Creek by developing thickets that link one area to another.

- **Identification and assessment of possible dispersal travel routes.**

  Presently there can only be guesses as to dispersal travel routes. We intend to make this important question much more concrete when we attain our collaring/take/capture permit from the Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Until next month, I hope that your endeavors are productive and rewarding. Take care.

**Bill Leikam - The Fox Guy**

*Urban Wildlife Research Project*