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.

Gray Fox Report for November 2016

Respectfully Submitted by
William C. Leikam, Founder of the Urban Wildlife Research Project (UWRP)

Dispersal & Problems

Mid-November and December brings in that time of year when the adults have raised the pups that have survived the long months between April and November. At this writing, the pups, the young ones, are dispersing; leaving their home range where they were born in order to find their own mate and a piece of brushy land big enough to start and to feed a new family.

The problem with the territory between US Highway 101 and the San Francisco Bay is that there is very little room that is not already taken, often by a skulk of foxes. (A skulk is a group of related and unrelated foxes.) This sets into motion a huge problem for the males in a given region. If they cannot find their own space, they often return to their home region, but that is untenable for it is the duty of the alpha male of the area to chase all single males out and as far from their home region as possible. (Example, Dark and his "son" Big Guy.) On the other hand, females are tolerated living within their home range, as long as they remain unattached, for far longer than the males, but once she pairs up with a male, both must leave the home range.

This is a necessity within the gray fox community, because if there are any males remaining when in January the females come into estrus (heat) inbreeding will occur. In the baylands, earlier this year, we saw it happen. The above then opens the question of without adequate territory to allow dispersal, what will happen to the young foxes? From my observations, unrelated gray foxes live side-by-side with others but in any given territory the question becomes is there enough food to feed upward of approximately ten pups born in April in a single location/home range?

These are the kinds of issues that are directly facing the gray fox population at the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve. In order to get the answers to these vital issues such as identifying pockets where inbreeding is taking place, it will become necessary to conduct both a DNA analysis of the fox populations in both areas that we monitor and follow that with a collaring program to find out exactly where these foxes go, asses the health of that region and work from there on habitat development so
General Health of the Gray Foxes

[Photo: Gray Fox Pup One Eye - last picture alive]

Getting a general sense of the gray fox's health through examination of their scat has serious limitations. All the way through the past few months of these fox reports, I have brought to the fore the wide spread gray fox eye infections. On November 2nd, one of the pups that had been born in the thickets along Matadero Creek came down with a serious eye infection in both eyes and became sick. This pup was picked up by Animal Serves, taken in, found to be infested with mites and was sent to the SPCA facility in Burlingame. In the end, the pup had to be euthanized after being carefully monitored for 48 hours. That young gray fox has been sent to the Department of Fish & Wildlife's laboratory to find out the precise reason for its illness and inability to recover. Results should be back by February 2017.

Two of the elder gray foxes, Mama Bold and her mate Gray whose home range was near the truck washing pad have died from unknown causes. No remains have been found of either. Additionally, it is possible that three of their pups have also died. In these cases, they may have been taken by one of the local Red-tailed Hawks or a Barn Owl in the area, for they went missing when they were still relatively small.

Animal Services picked up a dead female gray fox at the intersection of Geer and Maddux streets. It appeared as though she had been hit by a car sometime in the night. She is most likely one of the females from the skulk along Matadero Creek.

Total Numbers Of Gray Foxes in the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve

I do not have an accurate count for the month of November, save that there are two, a pair, living on the hill at the junction of Embarcadero and Harbor roads. There are a number of dispersers coming through the area, but it's nearly impossible to gauge the numbers. Besides, these dispersing young will not likely remain in the local region.

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

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

1. On November 19th, I was one of two featured speakers at Barnes & Noble's Wild Book Festival in Corte Madera, where Beth Pratt-Bergstrom’s new book When Mountain Lions are Neighbors was the headliner of the evening. Greg Kerekes also spoke about aspects of the urban wildlife that we are studying. What a stellar audience. There were very well known researchers in a variety of wildlife and conservation disciplines, authors and the conservation shakers and doers here on the California scene. I was honored to speak to such a well heeled audience.

2. 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 and Greg Kerekes and UWRP.

3. Watch for a new article about our work with the gray foxes and the corridor connectivity tracking that Greg and I are doing in the San Jose Mercury News. I will
To find out more about us, search Greg Kerekes, Bill Leikam - The Fox Guy, Urban Wildlife Research Project, UWRP, gray foxes, corridors, and more.

1. We changed the URL for our website to Urban Wildlife Research Project.com.
2. Check out our UWRP Facebook Page.

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**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.
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