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The Big-Eared, Bushy-Tailed Fennec Fox

by Guy Belleranti

In the deserts of North Africa and Saudi Arabia lives the smallest of all foxes with the largest of ears. This animal is the fennec fox.

Fennec foxes have ears that are 5 to 6 inches long. That's big for an animal that weighs less than four pounds. Their ears help shed body heat. And, as you may have guessed, they also provide great hearing.

It's interesting to compare the big ears of fennec foxes to the small ears of arctic foxes. Arctic foxes live in cold climates, so they don't need to shed heat. Instead, they need to save heat. Big ears would not save heat and would probably even cause an arctic fox to get frostbitten!

It's also interesting to think about the hair of fennec foxes. Why would a fox that lives in the desert need a thick, fur coat? Actually, the desert isn't always warm. During the nighttime, a desert can be downright cold! A fennec fox's fur keeps them warm during those chilly desert nights. They also have long bushy tails that they use as a blanket. And the hair on their feet protects them from the hot sand in the daytime.



Fennec foxes live in small communities of burrows or dens. They spend most of the day sleeping in their dens, out of the hot sun. Then, when night comes, out they come in search of food. In addition to their great hearing, fennecs also use their great sense of smell and big eyes to track down dinner. Animals that are active at night are called nocturnal.

Like other foxes, fennecs are omnivores. This means they eat both meat and plants. Some of their favorite foods include rodents, birds, eggs, insects, lizards, snails, fruit and leaves.

Fennec fox mothers give birth to a litter of one to five babies (called kits). The average life span of a Fennec fox is 10 to 12 years.

The cream coloration of fennec foxes help them blend into their desert habitat. Still, they have to watch out for predators. These include caracals (a type of wild cat), jackals, eagle owls, hyenas and humans. Humans catch them for their fur and to sell as exotic pets.

About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.