

Report on the 2000 Swift Fox Releases onto the Blackfeet Tribal Lands, Montana



for
Cochrane Ecological Institute
Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department
Defenders of Wildlife
Montana State Fish, Wildlife & Parks Service
The Queen's University of Belfast

Introduction

On the 27th of August 2000 the second set of swift fox reintroductions to the Blackfeet Tribal Lands, MT, took place. In 1998 30 captive-bred foxes were released, and in 1999 15 foxes were released. Follow-up surveys showed signs of both survival and reproduction in the wild. This year 31 foxes were released, consisting of 20 females and 11 males. Sixteen of these foxes were radio-collared, with collars bought by Defenders of Wildlife and the Queens's University of Belfast. The foxes were monitored for a four week period after the release by a postgraduate student, and a number of volunteer workers who were available for varying periods of time. At the end of this period the monitoring was taken over by two Blackfeet wildlife biologists. The initial four week radio-tracking data is currently being analysed and will be provided in a further report.

The releases were again the result of a joint project run by the Cochrane Ecological Institute, the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department, and Defenders of Wildlife, with the inclusion of a postgraduate student from The Queen's University of Belfast.

Saturday 26th August 2000

All volunteers arrived at the release site at the Blackfeet Tribal Ranch. The ranch is situated approximately 20 miles south east of the town of Browning within the Blackfeet Reserve, Montana. The foxes were watered, then taken to each individual release site, and placed next to the portable protective shelter (PPS) allocated to that site. Once they were in place the foxes were fed with chicks. The sites were as follows:

Release Site (UTM)	Volunteer	Foxes	Radio Frequency
1. 0380122E 5373668N	Lu Carbyn	Konsko	f S952 150.574
		Kaksimi	f S953 -
		Kakoo	f S954 150.496
2. 0380009E 5373676N	Safi Darden Sian Waters	Kaiyo	m S974 -
		Koko	m S975 150.375
		Kine	f S976 -
		Kitstaka	f S977 150.254
3. 0379927E 5373540N	Clio Smeeton Catriona Matheson Sonamara Matheson	Kinnekinick	m S955 150.596
		Kokos	m S956 150.476
		Katoyosis	f S957 150.215
4. 0379798E 5373426N	Samantha Bremner Stephen Harrison	Ketapis	m S978 150.536
		Kattana	m S979 -
		Kisapa	m S980 150.234
		Katoyisix	m S981 150.435

5. 0379749E 5373398N	Will Roberts Emily Caruso	Kipitaki	f S969	-
		Ksaakum	f S970	-
		Kokoto	m S971	150.536
		Kachatan	f S972	150.396
6. 0379701E 5373446N	Ben McLeod	Kylie	f S958	150.456
		Kenna	f S959	150.315
		Kody	f S961	-
		Kowboy	f S962	-
		Kip	f S963	-
7. 0379662E 5373411N	Dennis Jorgensson David Couper	Kootenai	f S964	-
		Kakatosi	m S965	150.416
		Kisomm	f S966	-
		Kokona	f S967	150.296
		Kipitaki	f S968	-
8. 0379353E 5373341N	Emil Roessingh Lynne Sutherland	Kitakopsim	f S982	-
		Kaatsi	m S983	-
		Kakasin	f S985	-

Saturday 27th August 2000

Weather – cloudy, cold and windy.

Site 1 – Observer: Lu Carbyn

- 06:30 – opened doors to kennels, one fox came out quickly, circled the cloud kennels about 20m away and then returned.
- 06:32 – the other two foxes came out, one fox checked out the PPS for 1.5minutes.
- 06:36 – second fox entered PPS. One fox cached chick.
- 06:40 – one fox bolted up over the hill heading south
- 06:44 – second fox moved north, third fox stayed at shelter, ate a chick. Moved around the cloud kennels, circled the kennels and went into the PPS.
- 07:10 – wind picks up
- 07:12 – fox at shelter eats chick
- 07:14 – circles around the kennel
- 07:15 – single fox at cloud kennels is investigating a ground squirrel.
- 07:16 – uncollared fox appears. Ventures away from PPS towards observers – spooked – moves back towards PPS but not inside, circles.
- 07:17 – collared fox heads east.
- 07:30 – collared fox runs across ridge behind the PPS towards the river.
- 07:40 – two radio-collared foxes released from the PPS to the west ran immediately towards the ridge and down to the river. Third fox remains near the box. Two radio-collared foxes appear walking along ridge heading for the river.
- 07:45 – Third fox hanging around near the PPS, moving to the west away from the box.
- 07:55 – Fourth fox visible near the PPS, moves to tent and circles around it.
- 09:20 – Three foxes running together on top ridge to the north east – about 350m from PPS.

Site 2 – Observer: Safi Darden & Sian Waters

- 06:40 – uncovered foxes and gave them water
- 07:37 – released foxes. One collared and one uncollared loped away over the ridge while one collared and one uncollared stayed behind hunkered down and looking around. Collared fox finds PPS and uses it, uncollared still outside, ears flat and not relaxed.
- 07:42 – two collared foxes (Clio's?) 30m from our PPS, walked towards coulee.
- 07:43 – the two foxes from site 2 come back over the ridge and encounter Clio's two foxes – there is a greeting and slow chase by the uncollared fox.
- 07:47 – uncollared fox trots off towards me.
- 07:52 – collared fox approached observers, looks about and sniffs area. Circles tent and then stands alert, looks towards cars parked by site 3 and whistled 3 times. Scat marks and starts off towards PPS, enters PPS. Emerges within 1min and trots about.
- 07:57 – collared fox trotting about, whistles, collared male and uncollared female foxes spotted again in NW
- 08:00 – collared female trots off towards SE
- 08:02 – collared male, uncollared female from NW trotting towards PPS, then stop and sniff

around. Runs over ridge to the north.

- 20:59 – spotted one uncollared male approaching from the NE – came within approx 5m of observers then trotted up to road and inspected cloud kennels.
- 21:01 - spotted 2nd fox in Site 1 just north of PPS, ran over the ridge and out of sight
- 21:04 – spotted one fox by site 3 trotting along bank above PPS. May be the same male spotted at 20:59.
- 23:40 – spotted one fox standing by PPS at site 1
- 02:33 – spooked one fox just SE of site 1's PPS
- 04:40 – no foxes spotted
- 08:50 – all chicks gone from PPS. Prints outside – unsure if foxes inside.

Site 3 – Observers: Clio Smeeton, Catriona Matheson, Sonamara Matheson

- 6:45 – Ira arrived on foot
- 6: 50 – Maja arrived and parked on trail, out of sight of PPS
- 7:00 – Maja, Ira, and Clio opened kennels, retreated to observe.
- 7:10 – all foxes out of kennels
- 7: 11 – radio collared fox knocked antennae against PPS, spooked and ran off, up hill from site
- 7: 20 – remaining foxes exploring area within a 20m radius of PPS
- 7:45 - Maja moved vehicle, spooked remaining foxes into running off towards Site 2
- 8:15 – one radio collared fox reappeared from NW
- 8:20 - fox moved off towards SW, joined 2 other foxes, vanished behind slight rise.
- 9:00 – Truck, with barking dog in back, appeared on top of hill overlooking PPS
- 10:00 – no foxes
- 11:00 – no foxes
- 12: 00 – no foxes
- 1:00 – no foxes
- 2:00 – no foxes, packed up to return to CEI

28/08/00 – all chicks gone, hole dug underneath PPS

Site 4 – Observers: Samantha Bremner & Stephen Harrison

- 07:08 – kennels opened
- 07:10 – all four foxes out, exploring den and kennels. One fox more cautious than rest
- 07:11 – one fox (3RC) moves 10m towards me, then back to kennels
- 07:12 – 1RC off right towards site 5
 - 2RC in PPS
 - 1RC heads off to the north, loping
 - 2RC in PPS, comes out again
 - 1 non-radio collared (NRC) fox in PPS
 - radio-collared (RC) foxes exploring holes next to PPS
- 07:19 – run back to PPS
- 07:20 – 2RC moves west, meets 2 other foxes
- 07:22 – 2RC and 2 NRC play-chase all around the area

- 07:23 – 1RC comes back to the PPS
- 07:24 – 1 NRC approaches from the west, 1RC runs to greet it, is submissive
- 07:25 – both foxes move towards PPS
- 07:26 – both move east, then south towards Stephen
- 07:27 – back to PPS, NRC heads south, 1RC follows
- 07:28 – 1RC back to PPS
- 07:29 – goes into PPS
- 07:30 – leaves PPS
- 07:31 – NRC leaves PPS
- 07:31 – NRC exploring round PPS and kennels, 1RC standing next to PPS
- 07:32 – two foxes appear from the west, 1RC runs towards them, NRC is still exploring
- 07:34 – 1RC and 2 new foxes move to north-east, NRC is lying flat near PPS
- 07:35 – 2 RC's heading towards PPS, NRC lying very flat to the ground watching them. 1RC goes into a hole 15m west of the PPS and out again.
- 07:35 – 2 new RCs come up to tent, NRC still very flat
- 07:36 – sniff round tent, move towards a new NRC approaching from the west. NRC explores. 1RC moves back to PPS.
- 07:38 – 2 RC's and 2 NRC's all at PPS. NRC is aggressive towards the other NRC. 2 RC's head south. NRC in and out of PPS, other NRC exploring. 2 NRC's chase each other round the PPS.
- 07:40 – watching Stephen
- 07:41 – both exploring
- 07:44 – NRC 25m to the west, back to PPS, chases other NRC
- 07:46 – NRC back to PPS, other NRC back to PPS, runs off to the west.
- 07:46 – other NRC in and out of PPS then off to the south
- 07:47 – checking out holes
- 07:48 – collecting chicks
- 07:49 – into PPS
- 07:50 – four foxes approach from the west, 1RC and 3 NRC foxes. One NRC circles the tent, another lies 4m east of the PPS.
- 07:52 – two NRC's west of the PPS, 1 NRC exploring south of the PPS, lies in a dip
- 07:54 – NRC exploring 7m from PPS (east), moves west
- 07:57 – NRC runs past the tent and to the PPS
- 07:58 – heads east
- 08:15 – fox west of site 5 – NRC, heads south, then back north-west
- 08:19 – 1RC and NRC (Georgio & Geneoffa's) behind tent, sniffing at traps, move to site 5
- 08:45 – 1RC and NRC hanging around PPS.
- 08:47 – head north
- 08:57 – head towards tents, then south
- 09:00 – sniff round trucks, move to PPS 5
- 09:03 – investigate PPS 5, 1RC digging, NRC moves west – hunting grasshoppers
- 09:05 – Investigates kennels
- 09:06 – moves west
- 09:12 – 1RC and NRC west of PPS heading south east
- 09:15 – investigate to the south, move back towards PPS
- 09:16 – investigate PPS and kennels. 1RC digging. Go into PPS

09:21 – RC fox heading south-east (different fox)
09:23 – 1RC in PPS, NRC out of sight, may have gone in PPS while writing last entry
16:04
to
21:10 – same two foxes in area of camp, in and out of PPS and area
22:00 – no foxes
00:00 – no foxes
01:15 – one fox south of PPS
02:00 – no foxes
03:30 – no foxes
05:30 – no foxes
08:00 – no foxes

Site 5 – Emily Caruso and William Roberts

07:05 – open kennels
07:06 – two foxes come out, go to PPS, one goes back into kennel. Third fox runs out, first two follow, head over brow of hill
07:10 – three of the four foxes ran off to the south
07:11 – one fox returns, from the east
07:12 – last fox out of kennel, remains close to kennels, keeping low, moves between PPS and kennels
07:13 – Second fox returns, comes from the west
07:14 – fourth fox still exploring but increasing area
07:16 – fox comes to within 6-8ft of tent, heads back to PPS
07:20 – second and fourth foxes sniff at each other, then 4th follows 2nd
07:23 – one of the two comes back to the PPS, sniffs around, then sits down
07:25 – runs off the east keeping low to the ground
07:26 – fox approaches from the SE, comes close to the tent, goes to the PPS, then continues NW over the hill
07:31 – three foxes approach, two are radio-collared, come close to the tent, then walk around, the uncollared stays at the PPS while the other two head SE.
uncollared walks a little way SW, comes back immediately, walks sniffing to the south
07:35 – two radio-collared again, hung around PPS, uncollared seemed to try and chase them off but was unsuccessful
07:41 – two uncollared foxes are lying near the PPS
07:42 – two uncollared seem to be fighting – play or real? Come back to PPS, the one which the first one seemed to be seeing off makes a few more attempts to come to PPS, then heads NE, comes close to tent
07:45 – uncollared comes back to PPS, goes inside then out again
07:46 – two uncollared seemt to be playing round the PPS
07:56 – one extra uncollared fox appears from behind the PPS
08:00 – one uncollared fox comes to the PPS
08:31 – no foxes at PPS
08:40 – one radio-collared and one uncollared (vertical stripes) hang around the PPS.
08:42 – both leave the PPS area

- 08:44 – same two foxes back at PPS
- 09:05 – same two foxes still hanging round PPS, come right up to tent then go back to PPS
- 09:23 – can't see any more foxes
- 17:11 – two collared foxes near tents, sniff around and leave again
- 18:47 – same two foxes hanging round tents

No foxes seen during night, scanned every two hours.

Site 6 – Observer: Ben McLeod

- 07:10 – let foxes out. One fox with radio-collar comes out right away and started exploring, staying close to the site. Another fox comes out and takes off to the east in a shot. Third fox out, staying close, skulking low checking out the new surroundings, another fox follows.
- 07:15 – one of the foxes comes over to check out my tent. Two foxes are checking out old holes. Both are skulking low and checking out their location. Now both are heading to the west. Checking out site 5 and sniffing around. Unless I missed it I think there is still one fox that hasn't come out. If it has it must have made a quick dash. One of the foxes returns from the west showing lots of confidence, head is high and is prancing around the cages, then over the hill to the north
- 07:30 – fox shows up and goes into the PPS. I think it is one from this site. I think the other fox is out now, the two of them run around the PPS and then off to the west to site 5.
- 07:40 – the two foxes that are here seem settled down. Both have dye on their left ears. Head off to the other site again. Have only seen one fox with radio collar on. Fox with radio collar spotted returning to site 5 from the south in a mad dash. One fox returns from site 5 to site 6. Another fox returns from site 5.
- 08:20 – looks like a fox has a gopher near site 5, munching on something bigger than a chick. One fox returns to site and goes into PPS.
- 08:30 – Radio collared fox returns, dye on right ear
- 08:35 – two foxes chasing another fox, then fighting. The two foxes then return to site 5 and the one they were fighting with stays at site 6.
- 09:00 – two foxes return, one with radio-collar. Hang around fox a bit and wander off. Another fox has showed up with dye on left ear, eats a bug or something.
- 09:30 – radio-collared fox ran past me heading west to site 5. It has now come back to site 6.

Things are slowing down, not much action on the fox front.

- 20:45 – two foxes return, one with radio collar. Seem to be staying close to the PPS

No foxes spotted through the night

Site 7 – Observers: Dennis Jorgenson & David Couper

- 06:50 – kennels opened. Foxes come out, some are very cautious, some more curious. After 5 to minutes four ran towards river, one remained about 20 metres from the PPS.
- 07:07 – one returned to the den box, exploring immediate area.

- 07:10 – ventured further away, examined tent, moved towards site 6, then went up over the hill towards site 5.
- 07:12 – two foxes from site 6 come over to our PPS, one bolted the other continued to explore our site
- 07:19 – the fox which remained at the PPS moved up the hill towards site 5, then disappeared
- 07:21 – new fox appears, begins exploring our PPS
- 07:27 – two foxes approach from the direction of site 6
- 07:30 – fox approaches truck then runs to site 6, comes back to truck and tent then returned to PPS where it encountered another fox. The two left as a pair and went to site 6
- 07:35 – pair return to our PPS
- 07:38 – another fox approaches from the west, begins fighting. One of pair remains at our PPS, other returns to site 6. Single fox ran west to site 5.
- 07:41 – pair meet at site 6. Single fox emerges from our PPS
- 07:43 – one fox of pair approaches truck then returned to site 6 PPS
- 07:46 – pair approach tent and truck
- 07:47 – pair encounter two more foxes east of our site
- 07:49 – two foxes run by, came from east of our site then went back east. Two foxes approach again from the east, got to PPS. One fox leaves and goes to site 6 PPS
- 07:59 – fox at site 6 bolted to the east
- 08:03 – single fox approaches from the east, explores PPS
- 08:04 – another fox ran from east to site 6 then came back towards our site and went north
- 08:08 – two foxes emerge from PPS
- 08:09 – one fox feds on chick, other one returned to site 6
- 08:11 – fox eats another chick, second fox returns from site 6 to our site (site 7)
- 08:15 – single fox approaches from the east, runs over to site 6 and explores
- 08:17 – one fox begins to dig next to PPS
- 08:20 – one fox approaches from north, spotted by fox from our site. They examine each other while crouched down, then new fox proceeded south towards site 6
- 08:27 – two foxes approach from east then move past our PPS, come back and are met by one of the foxes at our PPS. Initially one lies down and waves tail, then the two fight. All move to site 6. Single fox remains near site 6. Pair go to site 7 PPS.
- 08:33 – one fox at our PPS chased one from site 6. Single fox returns to our PPS, pair heads S.
- 08:41 – single fox continues to dig
- 08:42 – stops digging, disappears into PPS
- 08:49 – emerges from PPS
- 08:53 – fox at PPS spots pair over at site 6
- 08:54 – fox begins venturing towards site 6, moving slowly then runs over, explores site 6
- 09:02 – returns to our PPS and continues digging
- 09:03 – one collared and one uncollared approached from east. Wandered around truck then move to site 6. Explore general area of site 6 and 7 then went east. One disappeared down a hole in the ground, then came back up and they proceeded south and began exploring the PPS just east of site 5
- 09:15 – spot a collared fox at our PPS
- 18:00 – one fox seen briefly outside of PPS. Two foxes (one with radio-collar) running around between PPS 6 and 7. Looking into empty cloud kennels and Ben's tent. Joined by a fox

- 21:50 – two seen by site 6
- 22:05 – one fox at our PPS
- 23:30 – one fox at our PPS
- 01:06 – two foxes at our PPS
- 05:44 – one fox at our PPS
- 05:52 – two foxes at our PPS
- 08:15 – gave the foxes two bags of chicks, they proceeded to eat the chicks by bringing them back into the PPS. There was a commotion inside when they emerged from the PPS. One fox had a chick while the other one didn't. The fox with the chick was attempting to bury it when the other approached and there was an antagonistic interaction. The fox that had the chick remained while the other ran off to the south.

Site 8 – Observers: Emil Roessingh & Lynne Sutherland

- 06:45 – fox from other group observed at site
- 07:15 – kennels opened.
- 07:30 – one fox heading west and disappeared after exploring site.
- 07:50 – two foxes still at site, exploring area but returning to PPS. Staying close together. Foxes have entered shelter, explored gully and stayed within 100ft of shelter.
- 07:53 - Third fox sighted returning to site. Appears to belong to this group. Entered both PPS and cages.
- 07:56 – third fox leaves, going up gully to south
- 07:57 – other two foxes return to shelter, arrive from north direction, go in the gully.
- 07:58 – two foxes leave shelter heading south in same direction as third fox
- 08:02 – two foxes return, third fox seen at top of hill to the south
- 08:03 – two foxes return in gully north of shelter
- 08:10 – all three returning from west, grouse seen flying into willow near foxes
- 08:25 – all three return to shelter, enter, ate chick
- 08:30 – approach campsite, truck, return to PPS
- 08:40 – foxes leave, heading NW into gully after visiting PPS
- 08:50 – foxes have located a den on the east side of the gully, approximately 100yds north of PPS, seem to be content there
- 09:05 – four foxes at den in gully, one with radio-collar, three in den, one 10 feet above
- 09:10 – two foxes + one with radio-collar leave den, down gully to north

Gone from site from 14:30 – 16:45

- 16:45 - 05:30 – no sightings
- 18:00 – three foxes leaving den site, two return, one extra (4th fox) with radio-collar remains at den. Two foxes return, one starts digging at entrance to den while the other observes.
- 18:30 – One with radio-collars exits den, all four leave, heading north down gully.
- 18:25 – three foxes observed on west side of gully on crest of hill, down to gully. Fox with radio collar not there.
- 18:30 – three foxes at den, one sprawled out at entrance
- 19:40 – one of three at PPS resting, radio-collared fox at den with two uncollared. Two head down gully

19:50 – fox returns to den from shelter, observed with radio collar guy resting at den
19:55 – two above head north down gully
20:00 – three foxes observed further north on gully
20:15 – two new foxes running through our camp, one collared, one uncollared, head north down gully
20:20 – three foxes appear east of PPS, head south to top of hill, one collared
20:30 – two more foxes appear at PPS, go south up gully to top of hill
21:00 – dark, check den, no foxes seen.
21:25 – three foxes south-east of shelter
21:30 – three foxes approach and enter PPS from south in gully
Extremely windy.
22:30 – single fox in gully approaching PPS from south (uphill). Exhibits caution at light source
00:00 – sweep area, no sightings
06:30 – one fox, no collar, seen resting at new den entrance