

THE
YUKON TERRITORY

==
ITS HISTORY AND
RESOURCES



ISSUED BY DIRECTION OF
THE HON. W. J. ROCHE, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR
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CHAPTER X.

FOX FARMING

THE Yukon was first explored by the officers of The Hudson's Bay Company, in pursuance of the fur trade, and there are still trappers in the more remote districts of the territory. The day of the trapper, however, is passing, chiefly by reason of the decrease in the supply of fur of good quality. In addition, numerous valuable fur bearing animals are destroyed by carnivorous mammals, before the trapper can inspect his traps, and the killing of animals, whose pelts are not in prime condition, constitute a large annual loss of valuable fur. These conditions can be eliminated when fur bearers are domesticated, and as a result fox farming is rapidly developing, particularly in the southern part of the Territory.

During the year 1913 over three hundred live silver, black and cross foxes were exported from the Territory, but in March, 1914, legislation was enacted by the Yukon Council prohibiting the exportation of live foxes except under



Polar fox (white) ranched in Russia. This animal is of the same species as the blue fox which is ranched in Alaska and Canada. The fox is in summer coat. "Fur-Farming in Canada," 1914

certain conditions. In consequence of this legislation four Limited Liability Companies have been formed, and between fifteen and twenty privately owned ranches are now in operation. It is estimated that the total value of foxes held in captivity on the 1st of January, 1915, was \$175,000.00, which does not include the increase for 1915.

The following is a list of fox and mink farms in the southern part of the Yukon:—

Names	Location	Black and silvers	Cross foxes	Mink
A. R. Austin	Tagish lake, Y.T.	5	22	..
E. J. Proulx	Carcross, Y.T.	4	6	..
Faulk Fox Farm	Carcross, Y.T.	5	25	..
Charles Ennis	Marsh lake, Y.T.	..	6	..
Colwell Fur Farms, Limited	Whitehorse, Y.T.	8	24	..
J. P. Whitney Black Silver Fox Co., Ltd.	Whitehorse, Y.T.	16	13	..
Whitehorse Black Silver Fox Co.	Whitehorse, Y.T.	5	9	..
Harry Chambers	Champagne Landing, Y.T.	6	21	..
M. E. Bones	Klaune Lake, Y.T.	2	48	..
Frank Back	Carmacks, Y.T.	1	10	..
Taylor & Co.	Carmacks, Y.T.	4	10	..
Jas. Boss	Lake Lebarge, Y.T.	3	12	..
J. R. Alguire	Whitehorse, Y.T.	4	10	..
McDade & Neilson	Carmacks, Y.T.	..	8	..
S. E. Chambers	Carcross, Y.T.	..	4	..
Wright Wenrich	Whitehorse, N.Y.	1	17	..
Leo Simmons	Carcross, Y.T.	..	2	20
Brown, Scott & McGlashan	Tagish Lake, Y.T.	40
Oscar Burbank	Jarvis River, N.Y.	25
Brewer & Geary	Hootalinqua River, Y.T.	..	2	40
		64	249	125

"Fox Farming in Canada" contains the following summary of the best conditions for fox ranching operations:—

1. Foxes should be ranched in woodland areas with good drainage in a climate cold enough to produce a heavy fur and overhair and which is cool in summer.
2. The value of the pelt depends on good health as well as on climatic conditions. Wholesome, varied food is a necessary condition for health and can be best secured in a thickly-settled rural district.
3. Foundation stock should be the best obtainable. The best foxes are those in captivity in ranches, and they have the additional advantage of being half-domesticated.

There are some advantages to be gained by conducting extensive ranching operations in one locality, particularly because breeding animals may be easily exchanged and the dangers of close, or in-breeding, prevented. Neighbours can also impart to one another more freely what their experience has taught them.

These advantages, however, may be offset by the difficulties of securing food for the foxes. In every rural township there is enough cheap meat and offal to supply flesh diet to scores of foxes, but not to hundreds. Several hundred foxes, therefore in one neighbourhood, would necessitate the purchase of costly meat. An ordinary farm has enough waste meat scrap, dripping, bread, biscuits and game to support several animals.

A WOODLAND SITE.—A wooded area, not subject to flooding, and where the snow does not pile up in deep drifts in winter, is best adapted for the site of the ranch. The subsoil should be a hardpan to prevent deep burrowing and escape under the fences. Areas which produce a growth of birch, spruce, fir and cedar, with heath plants and blueberries in the open areas, have usually a good turfy cover and a hardpan subsoil near the surface. In such a situation it is easy to erect pens as the fences have only to be extended down to hardpan to prevent the foxes from burrowing under and escaping. A sandy soil and subsoil, on the other hand, while providing good drainage, entails an additional expense, as foxes can burrow to depths of six feet or more. A family of foxes working one behind the other will relay earth out of a sandy hole in a veritable shower. In ordinary loam, the fence is not considered safe unless it extends down a depth of over three feet or is founded on a subsoil of considerable hardness.

Proximity to the dwelling of the keeper is also an important consideration. This is usually accomplished by building the ranch in a woodland lot a few hundred yards distant from the house, or, if the ranch is a considerable distance from the owner's dwelling, by building a house for the keeper. It is not advisable to keep fox pens nearer than ten rods to a dwelling as, particularly during muggy weather, the peculiar and somewhat disagreeable 'foxy' smell is strong and unpleasant.

The advantages of a large woodland ranch may be summed up as follows:—

1. The outer fence and bush cover protect the foxes from curious sightseers, dogs, cattle and thieves, and give them a sense of being hidden from enemies.

2. The bush cover is especially valuable for nervous foxes to hide in and to provide shade for the fur. They will also sleep contentedly all day under a bush, where it is more healthful than in a nest or a burrow.

3. The outer fence is an additional insurance against escape to the woods. If a fox escapes from the paddock, he can be easily caught in the outer enclosure, or, if the door is left open, he may, of his own accord, go back to his pen at feeding time.

4. The snow does not pile in drifts, but lies level, on wooded areas. Huge drifts necessitate higher fences, or wiring over, to prevent escape. Fences do not need to be more than six or seven feet high if the snow never lies more than one or two feet deep.

5. A ranch in the woods has more equable climatic conditions. It is cooler in summer, less windy in winter, and is warmer for young foxes in the spring. There is less thawing and freezing up of snow to injure the fur. It also affords protection from rain and sleet.

6. The foxes can hide from thieves and could not be captured by a stranger unless the house were broken into when they were shut in their nest. So much noise, however, would be sure to rouse the dog and the watchman.

7. The outer enclosure permits of protective measures being taken. The keeper sleeps in a house there. Dogs are kept chained. Traps for thieves are laid, as, *e.g.*, bear traps, burglar alarms, electric shocking devices; and some ranches are lighted with lanterns or electric lights and are equipped with telephones.

8. Large ranches seem to be more successful than smaller ones, because foxes in contiguous pens are company for each other."



The fur of these seven months' old pups is in prime condition and almost as valuable as that of maturer animals

The following particulars will also be of value to those who are interested in judging a silver fox skin:—

The condition of the pelt in respect to primeness, proper killing, skinning, drying and shipping is important. Skins may be blue or unprime; springy, when the hips and shoulders are worn and the hair loose; dirty, shot, chewed, heated, or greasy. In such cases their value is largely decreased.

The skin value of the live animal may be judged from the following standards:

Colour.—Glossy black on neck, and wherever no silver hairs are found. The black must be of a bluish cast all over the body rather than a reddish. The underfur must also be dark-coloured. The fur of silver and black foxes is a dark slate next to the skin.

Silver hairs.—Pure silver bands—not white nor very prominent. In the costliest skins there are only a few silver hairs, which are well scattered over the pelt. Flakiness, which is the appearance of whitish silver hairs placed close together in patches, is objectionable.

Texture.—Buyers pass judgment on the skins by drawing the hand over the fur. The softest fur is the most valuable. The quality of softness is referred to as "silkeness".

Gloss.—The sheen must be evident. It is caused by the perfect health of the animal and the fineness of the hair, as well as by hereditary



A red fox of Russia. "Fur-Farming in Canada," 1914. (Courtesy of V. Generosoff.)

influences. Woods and humid atmosphere also favour this important quality.

Weight.—A good fox skin will weigh at least one pound, the weight usually varying from ten to nineteen ounces. The thick, long fur makes the weight. This is a very important point, as heavy fur is more durable and handsome.

Size.—The value of silver fox pelts increases with the size.

In discussing the classification and colour phases of the common red fox Mr. J. Walter Jones in "Fox Farming in Canada" makes the following observations:—

The common red fox, which exists in the greatest numbers, has a range which "extends across Europe and northern and central Asia to Japan, while, to the

south, it embraces northern Africa and Arabia, Persia, Baluchistan and the northwestern districts of India and the Himalayas." In North America, its range extends south to Virginia and includes all Canada (except some northern regions), and the northeasternmost portion of the United States. Its wide geographical range accounts for many distinct local phases or geographical varieties. These phases, or sub-species, differ from one another in form, in size and, to some extent, in colouring; but the differences are often not apparent to the untrained observer. It is easy to distinguish the four species of foxes commonly seen in America, viz., the common red with its white tipped tail, the arctic or polar fox with its short ears and blue or white pelt, the kit-fox with its black tail and small size, and the gray fox with its gray and red colour and erectile hairs down the tail; but it is more difficult to distinguish the sub-species of the common red fox.

The popular classification is by colour, as follows:—

COMMON RED FOX (*Vulpes*), found in some districts in several colours, viz.:

Red fox—When red or yellow over sides and back.

Silver fox—When no red is present.

Cross or patch fox—When the sides and neck are red and the back, shoulders and hips are silver. An intermediate between silver and red.

The red, silver and cross foxes are not distinct species and not even distinct breeds. Silver foxes usually breed true to colour, and continued selection will insure the distinctive colour markings of each colour variety.

Scientists, of course, follow the universal rule of measuring the skulls and teeth for classification purposes. The colour is not a consideration with them. Merriam classified the North American red foxes as follows:—

V. fulvus—Ontario, Quebec, Eastern United States.

V. bangsi—Labrador and North shore of gulf of St. Lawrence.

V. delectrix—Newfoundland.

V. rubricosa—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Gaspé, Prince Edward Island.

V. regalis—Manitoba, Dakota, Montana, Alberta.

V. macrourus—Wyoming, Nevada.

V. abietorum—British Columbia, Alberta, North-West Territories.

V. alascensis—Alaska, Yukon.

V. harrimani—Kadiak islands.

V. kenaiensis—Kenai peninsula.

V. cascadenis—Washington, Oregon, California.

V. mecatior—California.

Investigation of the debated question of the colour phases of foxes has produced definite information regarding its occurrence. The fact that the cross, silver, black and red colours are all colour phases of the common red fox is of too common knowledge to warrant citing of the many cases examined for evidence. The colours all exist and why they exist may be left to the discussion of biologists, some of whom say that ages ago foxes were originally dark coloured and that the silver is atavistic. It will be more useful in this discussion to describe how the costlier, darker colour is produced from cheaper, red parents.