

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# 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.

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1. List two ways the fennec fox's ears help it to survive.

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2. Why does a fennec fox have thick hair?

- a. to help it survive in cold, arctic climates
- b. to help it survive in the cold, desert night
- c. to help it hear enemies approaching
- d. to help it shed heat



3. Where might you find a fennec fox in the wild?

- a. Brazil
- b. France
- c. Russia
- d. Egypt

4. Name some of the predators of the fennec fox.

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5. Name some animals that are prey to the fennec fox.

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6. A fennec fox just had a litter of kits. Which number of kits would the fox be most likely to have?

- a. two
- b. seven
- c. ten
- d. twelve

**Challenge:** With a parent or teacher's help, use the Internet to print out facts about fennec foxes and arctic foxes. Then, make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two species.

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Some of the sentences below are true. Others are false.

Read each sentence. If the sentence is true, write the word true on the line. If the sentence is false, cross out the underlined word(s) and write a new word on the line to make the sentence true.

1. A baby fennec fox is called a cub. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Fennec foxes are nocturnal. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Fennec foxes are carnivores. \_\_\_\_\_
4. The hair on a fennec fox's ears protects it from the hot desert sand. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Fennec foxes have ears that are about 6 inches long. \_\_\_\_\_
6. A caracal is a type of wild cat. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Fennec foxes search for food in the afternoon. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Fennec foxes live about 20 years. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Fennec foxes spend a lot of time sleeping during the daylight hours. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Fennec foxes live in communities of burrows or dens. \_\_\_\_\_

# ANSWER KEY

## The Big-Eared, Bushy-Tailed Fennec Fox

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1. List two ways the fennec fox's ears help it to survive.

Their ears help them shed body heat and provide great hearing.

2. Why does a fennec fox have thick hair? **b**
- a. to help it survive in cold, arctic climates
  - b. to help it survive in the cold, desert night
  - c. to help it hear enemies approaching
  - d. to help it shed heat



3. Where might you find a fennec fox in the wild? **d**
- a. Brazil
  - b. France
  - c. Russia
  - d. Egypt

4. Name some of the predators of the fennec fox.

Fennec foxes are hunted by caracals, jackals, owls, hyenas, and humans.

5. Name some animals that are prey to the fennec fox.

Fennec foxes hunt and eat birds, insects, lizards, and snails.

6. A fennec fox just had a litter of kits. Which number of kits would the fox be most likely to have? **a**
- a. two
  - b. seven
  - c. ten
  - d. twelve

**Challenge:** With a parent or teacher's help, use the Internet to print out facts about fennec foxes and arctic foxes. Then, make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two species.

# ANSWER KEY

## The Big-Eared, Bushy-Tailed Fennec Fox

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Some of the sentences below are true. Others are false.

Read each sentence. If the sentence is true, write the word true on the line. If the sentence is false, cross out the underlined word(s) and write a new word on the line to make the sentence true.

1. A baby fennec fox is called a cub. **kit**
2. Fennec foxes are nocturnal. **true**
3. Fennec foxes are carnivores. **omnivores**
4. The hair on a fennec fox's ears protects it from the hot desert sand. **feet**
5. Fennec foxes have ears that are about 6 inches long. **true**
6. A caracal is a type of wild cat. **true**
7. Fennec foxes search for food in the afternoon. **at night**
8. Fennec foxes live about 20 years. **10 to 12 years**
9. Fennec foxes spend a lot of time sleeping during the daylight hours. **true**
10. Fennec foxes live in communities of burrows or dens. **true**