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Chadrad Communications, Inc.
226 Bordeaux St - Chadron, NE 69337
308-432-5545 fax 308-432-5601
E-mail: kcsr@chadrad.com

(Neb.)-CSC Students Begin Study Of Swift Fox



By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 11/04/2013 02:31 PM

(Chadron)- Chadron State College, in collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, has begun an effort to document the current distribution and abundance of the swift fox. Included in the study will be an attempt to identify any human-caused and ecological factors that limit their distribution in western Nebraska.

Lucia Corral, a UNL Ph.D. candidate, provided a methodology lecture and a hands-on training at CSC on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1. This past weekend, CSC students began installing trail cameras to survey the swift fox on private and public land. The standardized camera trap survey will be placed at 100 sites with each site consisting of 10 cameras for a minimum of 10 days

During the training sessions Corral explained the project and showed CSC student volunteers how to use GPS and set up a camera trap. The GPS will provide precise locations of the camera traps. From the survey information, Corral will create a distribution map of the swift fox.

Each camera and skunk-based attractant will be set up a minimum of a mile apart. The attractant consists of skunk scent and petroleum jelly applied to a lure stake. The camera and lure stick are 19.7 inches above ground and about eight feet from each other. The stake will also provide a reference for individual animals' height.

A full-grown swift fox is about the size of a house cat and its tail has a black tip compared the red fox which is larger and has a white tip on its tail. The swift fox tends to live underground in prairie landscapes while the red fox tends to live in wooded areas.

The cameras will be set up in the swift fox's preferred habitat of flat, open areas with short grass or overgrazed land. The camera will be placed on corner post, electric post, fences, windmills, or near water tanks. "Water gathers a diversity of animals," said Corral.

The cameras are equipped with movement detection and they record air temperature.

Corral said the cameras may capture images of raccoons, cows, red foxes, and deer in addition to the swift fox.

If the swift fox is not tracked, the information provided by the survey may establish possible characteristics of the land that contribute to their absence. The lack of swift foxes is not due to range management, but urbanization

and predation by coyotes.

The survey will take place in 24 counties in the western third of Nebraska.

—Miranda Wiczorek, College Relations Liaison