

# Kansas swift foxes being taken to South Dako-

FOXES, from Page 1

mackerel, but doesn't enter the trap. They call that a "visit."

He said they have caught other animals besides in the traps, set out on private land in a wide area from the southeast corner of Sherman County to southeast of Scott City. That included about 12 skunks, a raccoon, cottontail, a badger and two burrowing owls. Fletcher said all were released unharmed. The trickiest was releasing the skunks.

"None of us has been sprayed," he added.

Fletcher said the Texas Tech traps were bigger than the one they are using, accounting for the larger animals.

Big Eagle said he had come up to a trap and found a box turtle eating along the front edge. Fletcher said the box turtles are not found in South Dakota.

Grassel said they go out in the early morning to check the traps, and when they bring them back, each fox is carefully taken out of the trap with a special bag and a blood sample is taken to test for plague. He said once they are processed, they are given a couple of immunizations, and are then placed in the small cages until they can be taken back to South Dakota.

"We are planning to release these in pairs," Grassel said. "Some we think are already pairs from where they were caught, and for the ones who are not, we will try to play cupid."

Most of the foxes trapped so far are about a year old, Grassel said, but they did capture one older female that appeared to be about 4. He said the fox has a life span of about 5-6 years.

"Realistically, we anticipate having half the pairs left after one year," Grassel said.

Each fox will be equipped with a radio collar to keep track of where

they travel on the reservation. Grassel said next spring when the young ones are born, they will be trapped and have radio collars attached to keep track of them to see if they are spreading around the area.

Grassel said the swift fox is the fourth type of animal to be brought back to the reservation. Earlier projects brought back elk, bison and wild turkey. A special project reintroduced sweet grass, used in tribal ceremonies. He said the want to reintroduce the black-footed ferret to help control prairie dogs.

Grassel said he earned bachelor's and master's degree in wildlife biology from South Dakota State University, and has started on a doctorate at the University of Idaho.

Sheldon has been a tribal conservation officer for about 11 years. He said he was in the U.S. Coast Guard, where he received some law enforcement training. When he got out, the tribe was looking for a game officer, so he applied.

He helps the biologists with the studies, and does animal damage control for the tribe.

"If you have a problem with an animal, I'm the one who gets called," Fletcher said. "It can be a skunk under a house or any kind of animal complaint."

Big Eagle said he was a wild land firefighter for four years, working in lots of places in the West. He said that was seasonal work, but you could stay busy during the fire

season.

Grassel said Big Eagle handles the radio collars. Big Eagle said one of the male foxes was a real fighter, bit him through the bag and wouldn't turn loose.

Fletcher said each fox has a different personality, and Grassel said

they usually find the females are easier to calm down.

Saturday morning, the team was headed to Scott City for a warm meal and a place to wash some clothes before setting out another round of traps that night.

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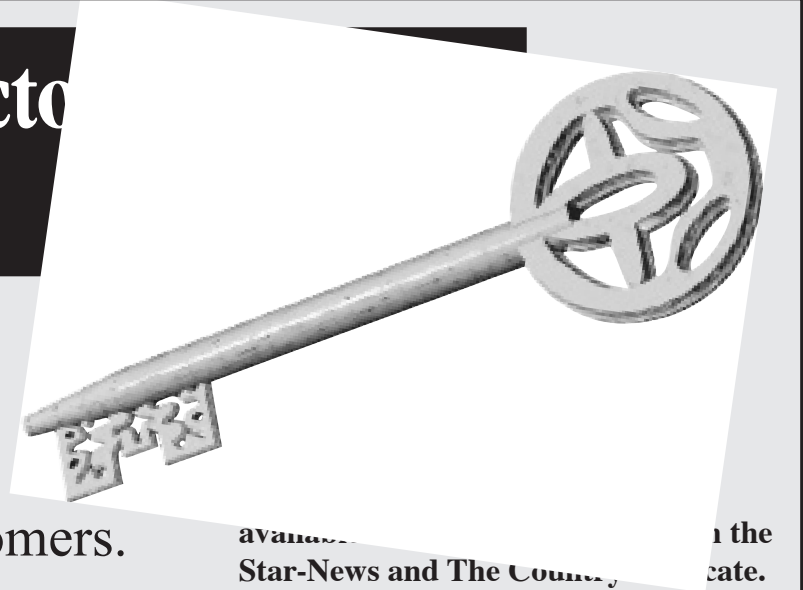
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