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## \$2,500 Reward Offered after Critically Endangered Red Wolf Killed in North Carolina

By John R. Platt | February 19, 2013

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has issued a \$2,500 reward for information about the January 18 shooting death of a critically endangered red wolf (*Canis rufus*) in North Carolina. The wolf, which wore a radio collar around its neck, was at least the 10th member of his species illegally shot and killed in the past 14 months. Fewer than 120 red wolves live in the wild today.



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The deaths have been a terrible setback for the [Red Wolf Recovery Program](#), which in addition to the wild population also maintains nearly 200 captive wolves in breeding facilities across the country. Red wolves used to live throughout the southeastern U.S. but were hunted into near extinction by the 1960s in order to protect livestock. The last 400 wolves in the region were brought into the captive breeding program in 1973. Most of them were found to be hybrids with coyotes (*C. latrans*), which started migrating to the area in the 1960s, leaving just 14 closely related pureblood individuals to form the founder population from which all of today’s wolves are descended.

The wolves living in the wild today—all in northeastern North Carolina—are part of what is designated as an experimental, nonessential population, much like the [Mexican gray wolves](#) (*C. lupus baileyi*) that have been released into Arizona and New Mexico. This means they can be recaptured whenever any of the animals interfere with human activities, although that rarely happens with the red wolves.

Despite their name, red wolves actually only have a touch of red on their ears, heads and legs. They are a little bit smaller than gray wolves and a little bit bigger than coyotes, for which they are often mistaken. In fact, many of the recent deaths have been attributed to people shooting at coyotes, an activity has become more common since the inception of a controversial new rule that for the first time allowed night hunting of coyotes using spotlights. The rule went into effect on August 1, 2012, and by November 14 four wolves had been killed. “There are a certain number of people who do mistakenly shoot these animals, but there are also a good number of people who know they are shooting red wolves,” Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Officer Frank Simms told [The Chronicle](#) last November after the fourth killing. “In both circumstances they are investigated equally, regardless.” Later that month several conservation groups successfully filed a request to [block nighttime coyote hunting](#) in the five North Carolina counties in which red wolves can be found.

The species is protected under the Endangered Species Act; anyone convicted of killing one of the animals faces a year in prison and a \$100,000 fine. Anyone with information on this latest red wolf death—or any past or future deaths—may contact Simms at (252) 216-7504, FWS Special Agent Sandra Allred at (919) 856-4786 or North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Officer Robert Wayne at (252) 216-8225.

For more information about the recovery program check out their [Return of the Red Wolf blog](#), which most recently covered efforts to pair a newly transferred male with a female whose mate was among those killed last year. For a more detailed look at the species, wait

until this June, when science writer T. DeLene Beeland's book on the animals, *The Secret World of Red Wolves*, will be published by University of North Carolina Press.

*Photo: A captive red wolf at the Virginia Living Museum, courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*


**About the Author:** Twice a week, John Platt shines a light on endangered species from all over the globe, exploring not just why they are dying out but also what's being done to rescue them from oblivion. Follow on Twitter [@johnrplatt](#).

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