

## **ASSESSING THE SUCCESS OF SWIFT FOX REINTRODUCTIONS ON THE BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION: PROJECT UPDATE<sup>TWS</sup>**

David E. Ausband, Wildlife Biology Program, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, MT 59812

From 1998 to 2002, the Blackfeet Indian Nation and Defenders of Wildlife reintroduced 123 captive-reared swift fox on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. Our current research project is directed at determining whether these reintroductions have established a self-sustaining population of swift fox on tribal lands. To obtain matrix-based growth rates for the fox population, we radio-collared > 60 animals and to date have known fates for 23 individual foxes. From 2003 to 2004 the fox population on the Reservation grew at a rate of 7 percent and projected growth for 2004-2005 was approximately 15 percent. Most swift fox mortality can be attributed to coyotes (57%) and raptors (22%). Also, because we thought that more releases might possibly be needed, we implemented a small mammal survey across the Reservation in an effort to estimate relative abundance of prey. During summer 2004, we placed 20 trap grids at random locations and captured 169 animals with deer mice (61%) and Richardson's ground squirrels (21%) comprising the majority of captures. This research project will be completed in autumn 2005.