

BY HANNAH SCHARDT

This magnificent *red fox* looks perfectly at home in a golden fall meadow. But a red fox is also at home in leafy woods, on a frozen tundra—even in a big city in the middle of summer!

There are 12 different kinds of foxes living in many parts of the world. But red foxes are found in more places than any other. And they seem to thrive in all kinds of weather. You could call them the anytime, anywhere foxes.

FALL

The days are getting shorter and the weather is getting cooler. But for the red fox, that is

just fine. It likes to hunt before sunrise and after sunset, anyway. And its thick, soft coat keeps it plenty warm.

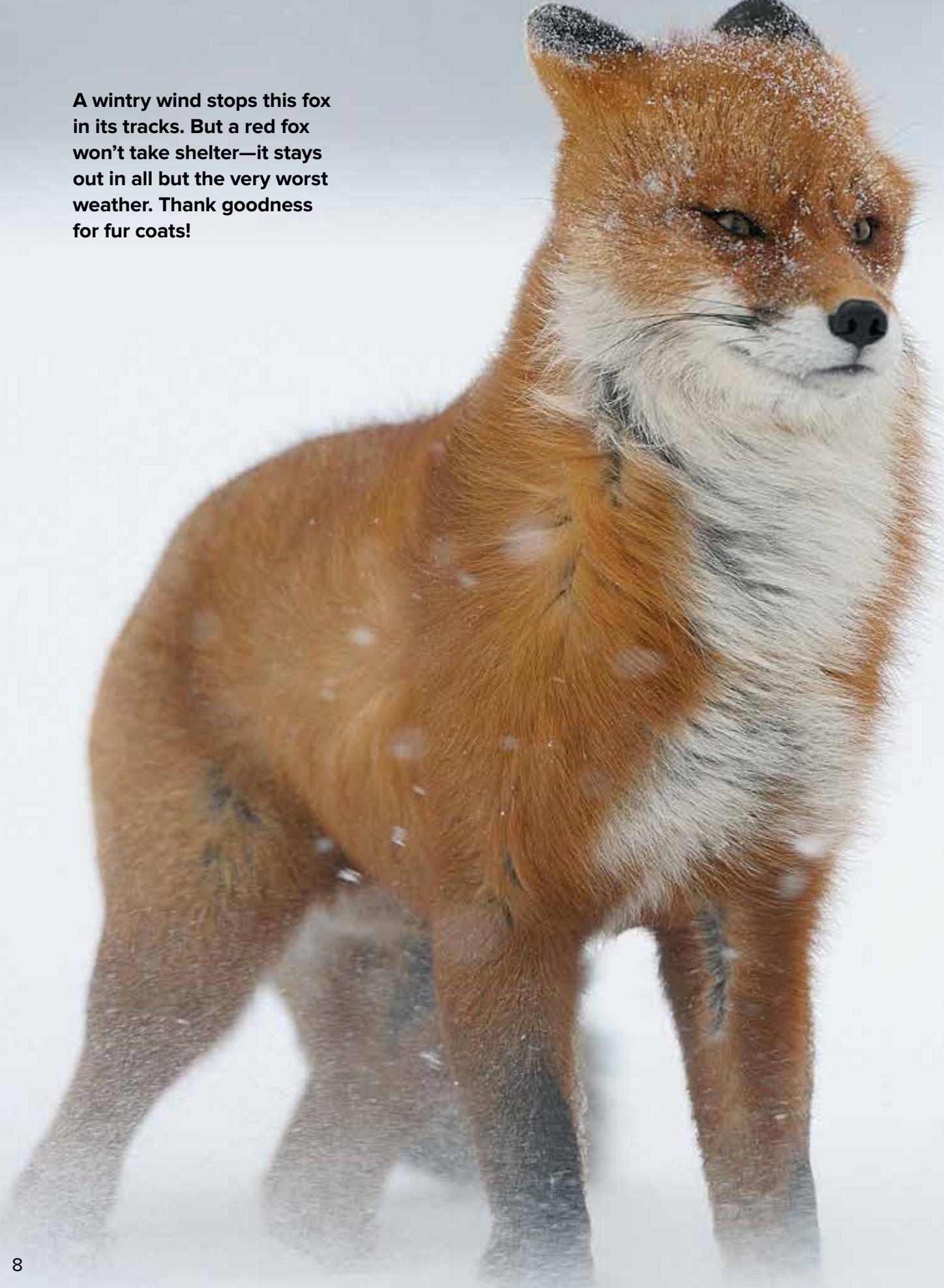
In fall, a red fox hangs out mostly alone. The babies have grown up and are on their own. So now is the time to focus on food. That's because, even for a master hunter such as a fox, winter can mean slim pickings. And winter is just around the corner.

Fox for All Seasons

Fall is a fine time to be a red fox. But so is winter, spring, or summer!



A wintry wind stops this fox in its tracks. But a red fox won't take shelter—it stays out in all but the very worst weather. Thank goodness for fur coats!



WINTER

In cold places, red foxes grow even longer, thicker winter coats. Instead of hiding out in a den, a red fox will usually just curl up right out in the open. Wrapped in its big, bushy tail, the fox stays nice and warm—even when it's completely covered by snow.

Finding food is a bigger problem. Small animals such as mice, ground squirrels, birds, and lizards make up most of a red fox's diet. And in some places, many of those prey animals are hard to find during the winter. Good thing that a

Even a rodent tunneling beneath the snow isn't safe from a keen-eared red fox. A leap (1) . . . a dive (2) . . . and a snow-covered snack! (3)

red fox has super-sharp hearing. It can hear a mouse squeaking from as far away as the length of a football field! And when it hears that squeak or a rustling in leaves or tiny footsteps under snow, it leaps into action! So even though there isn't as much food around, a red fox will find whatever food there is.

1



2



3



In the winter, every bite of food is precious. A red fox will face off against almost anything—even a hungry golden eagle—to get a meaty meal.

IGOR SHPLENOK/NATUREPL.COM (8); STEFAN HUWILER/ROLFNP.COM (9B); CHRIS O'REILLY/NATUREPL.COM (1, 2, & 3)





What a feast! The fox mom at left has several mouths to feed. So she fills her own mouth with a ground squirrel and a bird, and then takes the prey home to the den.

SPRING

For a red fox, spring means one thing: babies! Mom and Dad Fox mate in late winter. By spring, Mom huddles down in an underground den. She gives birth to a litter of four to six *kits*, or baby foxes. When they are born, the kits are about as long as dollar bills and completely helpless. They can't hear, can't see, and don't have any teeth.

Mom stays with the kits around the clock for the next two to three weeks. Snug inside her den, she nurses them and keeps them warm. (See **below**.)

By the end of that time, the babies' eyes have opened, they can hear, and they have sharp little teeth. Mom still nurses them, but they can eat bits of meat, too. It's time to start exploring!

SUMMER

Young kits need to become top-notch hunters—fast. They practice on small animals brought by their parents. And they stalk and wrestle with their littermates. Older brothers and sisters may help feed and care for the kits, too. The little foxes need all the help they can get. In just a few short months, it will be fall again. And these young foxes must be ready to go off and survive on their own—anytime, anywhere. 🦊

DONALD M. JONES (11TL); LENNIE & USCHI RUE III/RUE WILDLIFE PHOTOS (11TR)



At first, young foxes will hunt anything—even butterflies (above). A single insect won't make much of a meal, but catching it is good practice for when this youngster is on its own. Wrestling with a brother is also good practice—and good fun! (left)

