

## Goodbye To Faith The Fennec Fox

**Meet Faith the fennec fox and learn a little about her species, which is the smallest member of the canine family.**

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Faith the fennec fox had the large, batlike ears typical of her species.

Photos Courtesy of Jerry Murray, DVM

A large tumor on Faith's ankle was found to be malignant after removal; unfortunately, it regrew and spread.

Clients occasionally ask me, "What is the most endangered animal you have worked on." I smile and explain that I have worked on a snow leopard, a red wolf and almost 200 black-footed ferrets. Clients also ask, "What is the most unusual pet you have worked on." I reply with a long list that includes a bobcat, porcupine, kinkajou, genet, raccoons, cougar, and a fennec fox.

What's a fennec fox?

Fennec foxes (*Vulpes zerda*) are tan-colored members of the canine family. They live in deserts and arid areas of northern Africa and eat rodents, lizards, birds and bird eggs. They normally weigh only 2.5 to 3.5 pounds, which makes them the smallest member of the canine family.

The word fennec actually means having large ears, and they definitely have very large, batlike ears. Those large ears help the foxes hear their underground prey when they hunt at night. They also help keep the foxes cool during the heat of the day in the Sahara desert. They have a soft bark that sounds quite similar to a small dog (like a Yorkie or a Maltese).

I had a fennec fox case this past week at the clinic. She was an older fox who had a history of a large tumor on one of her ankles. Roughly 15 months ago I removed the tumor, and the pathology report described it as a malignant cancer (a spindle cell sarcoma) that had the potential to re-grow and to spread. Unfortunately the cancer did reappear close to its original location on her ankle. The fox did not appear to be in any discomfort, and the tumor did not limit her activity level. Thus the owner and I took a wait-and-let's-see-how-the-cancer-progresses approach and closely monitored her quality of life.

Surprisingly, she did fine for roughly 15 months. Then she took a rapid turn for the worse. She stopped eating and began having petite seizures. In her abdomen was a new tumor. At this point, the client and I decided it was time to put her to sleep. A necropsy (autopsy of an animal) revealed a rather large tumor involving almost the entire liver. The pathology report called it a malignant tumor of the liver (hepatic carcinoma). This sweet little fox was one of those special pets that I will miss.

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