

# Don't let the looks deceive you

by Dr. Les Dalton

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Those cute, cuddly, fluffy, inquisitive, white balls of fur known as Arctic Foxes, (*Alopex lagopus*), can be as dangerous as a bear or as lethal as a loaded gun.

The arctic fox is the primary reservoir on the North Slope for the rabies virus. The rabies virus is neurotropic, i.e. it attacks the nervous system and the disease of rabies is uniformly fatal in most warm-blooded mammals, including man.

Virus-laden saliva of a rabid animal is introduced by a bite and rarely by a scratch or break in the skin. Rabies virus enters muscle tissue initially and eventually advances to the peripheral and central nervous system. Incubation may be as short as a few days or as long as six (6) months. The incubation period is dependent upon the location of the initial wound, i.e. the closer it is to the head, the shorter the incubation period. It is also dependent upon the severity of the wound, the number of viral particles introduced, and the immune status of the victim.

Signs of rabies vary among animals, but may include:

1. Tingling or itching at the site of inoculation
2. Loss of coordination
3. Eating or biting objects such as rocks or wood
4. Aggression — particularly toward any moving object
5. Salivation/drooling
6. Death as a result of respiratory arrest

It is possible for an animal to be rabid and capable of transmitting the virus without any signs until death occurs.

Rabies tends to be cyclic or reaches a high peak every three (3) to five (5) years on the North Slope. Most cases of rabies in foxes are recorded during late winter. Populations of arctic foxes are highest in late summer during those years in which the lemming populations are high. As snow cover increases in the winter, the foxes are less able to capture lemmings and are then attracted to carcasses of large mammals such as whales, walrus, and caribou. They are also attracted to garbage dumps in search of food. Intra- and inter-specific contact, at such times, furthers the transmission of the virus. The long incubation period ensures that previously exposed animals will survive until the next winter to transmit the virus to other animals.

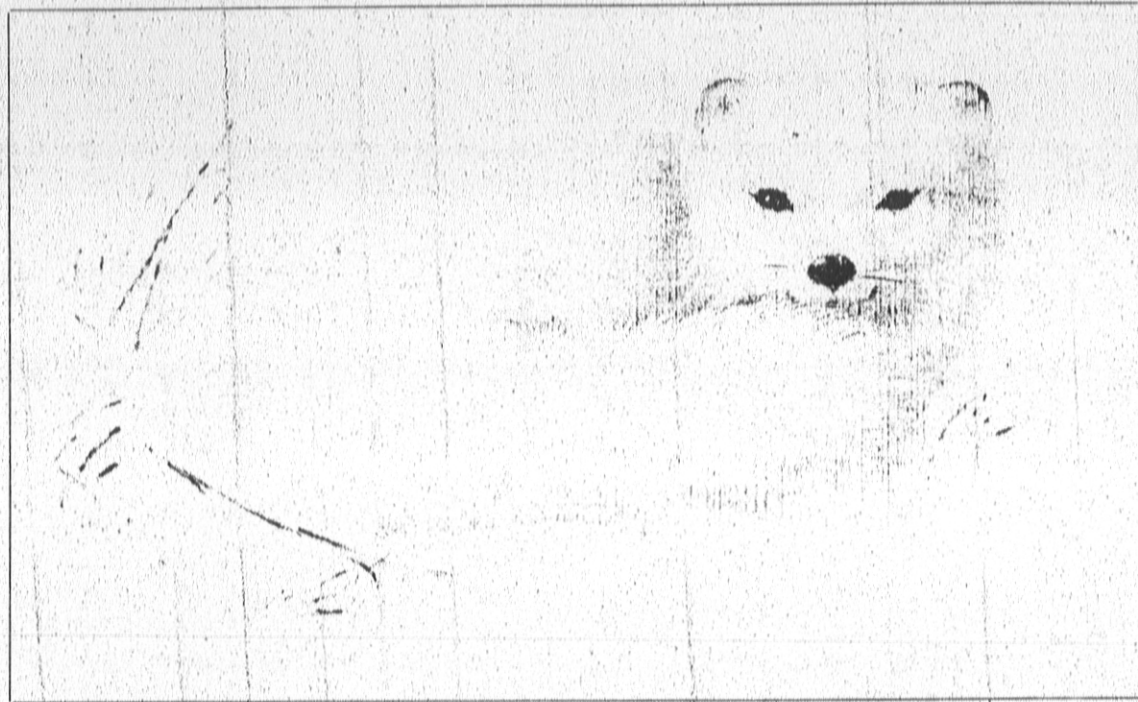
The following statistics regarding rabies and the arctic foxes clearly show the risk one takes by associating with them:

Year	# tested	# positive for rabies
1973	4	4
1974	13	5
1975	8	0
1976	12	2
1977	60	22
1978	7	4
1979	7	5
1980	21	17
1981	23	15
1982	37	35
1983	10	8
1984	17	11
** 1985	6	6

\*\* This figure represents only January through 23 April 1985.

Realizing now that arctic foxes are not as innocent as they appear, here are some do's and don'ts.

- DO: 1. Avoid contacts with any wild animal that appears friendly. Wild animals avoid human contact if they are healthy.
2. Report any animal acting unusual to the proper authorities in your area, usually PSO.
3. Destroy only those animals that act unusual.



4. Send any animal that is killed under these circumstances to:

Dr. Les Dalton  
Box 925  
Barrow, Alaska 99723  
(907) 852-2383

Call collect first for verification and instructions.

5. Wash hands well with soap and water after handling any animal.

- DON'T** 1. Encourage foxes to stay in an area such as camp or near a DEW line site by feeding or providing readily available garbage. If they are encouraged, the health risk is increased significantly.
2. Attempt to handle, capture, or feed wild animals.
3. Attempt to kill or injure any wild animal, especially foxes that do not act unusual.

**REMEMBER**, the probability that an animal is rabid is extremely high if that animal is showing signs that are unusual or unexpected for that animal. Rabies is a fatal disease in man but exposure can be avoided by taking precaution mentioned.



wondering, "What's on the tapes?" Well, I am glad you asked... The main topic was **Examples of Good Parenting Skills**. Another topic was: **Playing Is the Way Infants Learn**.

The participants were GREAT. For example: A mother in Wainwright introducing a number of new toys to her infant. Two young children in Nuiqsut, with the help of their mother, wash their hands and face and brush their teeth, and have fun doing it. A father in Barrow playing Point - Name, then run and touch it game with his two year old Grandparents in Atkasuk talking with their grandchildren. A mother in Pt. Lay with her infant during a Well-Baby-Check-up, as she uses the paper on the examining table to keep her infant very busy. A young child in Pt. Hope playing ball with her aunts and uncle. A family in Kaktovik working together on a project and including even the youngest member of the family. And in Anaktuvuk Pass, one to one time parent and infant sharing ideas together and enjoying it very much.

Hopefully, next year more taping will include you! There are sign-up sheets in each village clinic, or in Barrow call 852-3999.

Thank you for now!