

Sarcoptic Mange



- Sarcoptic mange is a crusting skin disease, due to infestation by a particular species of mite.

Species Affected in Colorado

- Coyotes
- Foxes
- Less commonly affected, but reported in black bears, porcupines, and fox squirrels

What to Look For

- Hair loss, especially over the face, lower legs, and tail (rat-tail)
- Thick crusting or scaling of the skin
- Intense itching and scratching
- Thin, debilitated animals



Red fox showing crusting and hair loss from scabies/mange.

Cause and Transmission

Sarcoptic mange (also known as scabies) is caused by the “itch mite” *Sarcoptes scabiei*, which is a microscopic parasite that burrows tunnels in the outer layer of the skin. These tunnels are filled with mites, mite eggs, and mite feces that are irritating and cause intense itching, crusting, and hair loss. Severely affected animals have substantial hair loss and appear thin and weak. Crusting of the eyes and ears can impair vision and hearing. Severely affected animals ultimately die from infections and exposure. Sarcoptic mange is highly contagious and mites usually pass to new hosts through social contacts or shared environments. Feeding wildlife attracts animals to shared spaces and increases social contacts. This is one reason that feeding wildlife species like foxes is illegal in Colorado, but unfortunately many mange epidemics in foxes occur in areas where feeding is occurring.

Public Health Considerations

Sarcoptic mange can be transmitted between wildlife, domestic animals, and humans, although severe infections typically only occur when transmission is between animals of the same species. Direct, skin-to-skin contact is the most common method of transmission, although infections can be transmitted through contact with heavily-infested material such as bedding. Pets can be protected from infection by preventing contact with wildlife and using mite-controlling products prescribed by a veterinarian. Treatment requires prolonged therapy that is not possible for free-ranging wildlife.

Additional Information/References:

Sarcoptes scabiei and sarcoptic mange, in *Parasitic Diseases of Wild Mammals* (Authors: Set Bornstein, Torsten Morner, and William M. Samuel)

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