

Foxes



Living with foxes

Foxes demonstrate how wildlife can live in towns alongside people. Most of the time people hardly notice them. Those who do generally enjoy seeing a wild animal in their neighbourhood. But sometimes foxes can cause a nuisance. This document highlights some of the problems that foxes may cause and shows how they can be dealt with in a humane and effective way.

About foxes

In some areas foxes have become more common than in the surrounding countryside. This is because they are very adaptable and can survive in a wide range of places, eating many types of food. A lot of the food they eat in towns is scavenged off the streets, or from under bird tables. They also eat earthworms, small animals and fruit. Adult foxes live in small family groups, especially during the breeding season.

Problems caused by foxes

What a racket!

Between December and February you may hear screaming sounds late at night. This is sometimes called the 'vixen's scream' and is thought to be the sound a female fox makes to show she is ready to mate. Once people know what this sound is, most are happy to put up with the noise. If it does become a problem, you can move the foxes on by using a repellent like the type you can buy to deter cats.

Mess and smells

As well as barking and screaming, foxes communicate with each other using scents. They produce strong-smelling urine and droppings to mark their territories. You may occasionally find that a fox is visiting your garden and leaving a smelly message behind!

If your garden is very important for a fox, it is likely to regularly mark the area with strong smells. While many people are happy to know that their garden is important for foxes, if you don't think this, and you want them to stop visiting it, the simplest way is to remove the reason why they are visiting. This could be food left on a compost heap or under a bird table, or a favourite hiding place such as under a shed.

Foxes and pets

It is extremely rare for a fox to attack a cat. Most of the time they simply ignore each other. Remember that foxes are really quite small and they are not a threat to dogs. Foxes usually prey on small birds and mammals, so they will eat pet rabbits, guinea pigs or chickens if they get the chance. The best way to protect rabbits, chickens and other small pets is to make sure they are kept in secure hutches or enclosures. It is also essential to prevent a fox from digging its way into the enclosure. A simple way of doing this is to lay chicken wire underneath the enclosure.

Fox homes

Foxes spend a lot of their time resting in their hole, called an 'earth' or 'den'. During the breeding season, young fox cubs live in their earth until they are old enough to start exploring the outside world. In the countryside, earths are usually in small tunnels hidden away among fallen trees or the banks of hedges. In cities and towns, fox earths can be found under sheds, in cellars or in any other quiet place. If you have foxes using your shed or cellar as an earth, you must be very careful if you want to deter them. This is because you could disturb the young foxes that may be living there. It is probably safer to try to deter them between September and December, outside the breeding season.

Dustbin devils?

Foxes are blamed for ripping open bin liners and overturning dustbins. Although foxes will scavenge food from almost anywhere, you should remember that cats and rats have very similar habits and may be to blame for causing the mess. The use of wheelie bins has reduced the problem in some areas. If you do not have a wheelie bin, the easiest way to solve the problem is to make sure that you have a dustbin that can be securely closed.

Gardener's world

Foxes will eat fruit, bulbs and other plants. They may dig for earthworms, but they usually prefer to catch earthworms on the surface. If you think that foxes are causing a problem in your garden, make sure that foxes are to blame. If you want to put them off coming into your garden, use the methods outlined later in this leaflet.

Shoes and toys

Foxes are very playful creatures and will sometimes steal shoes and toys left lying around. You will probably find them torn apart in a quiet part of the garden. To avoid this, make sure you keep your shoes and toys indoors.

Foxes and disease

Many people worry that foxes can spread disease. In mainland Europe, foxes carry rabies, but there has not been an outbreak in the UK for many years. Wild foxes have never been found suffering from distemper (a viral disease affecting the respiratory system, digestive system and central nervous system) and are unlikely to spread this serious disease amongst dogs. Foxes can suffer from Weil's disease (a disease that causes liver and kidney damage), but properly vaccinated pets are not at risk.

Mange, a parasite infection which causes skin irritation and loss of fur, has spread rapidly among foxes and has caused them to disappear from many areas. This disease can be transferred to pets (especially dogs), but is easily treated.

If you find a diseased or distressed fox, report it to the RSPCA immediately.

Feeding foxes

Although there is usually plenty of food for foxes to catch or scavenge, many people enjoy feeding them. If you want to feed foxes, tinned dog food is very nutritious. You should stop feeding foxes if a neighbour is finding them a nuisance. This should make sure that your neighbours do not take extreme measures to get rid of them. You must also remember that foxes can start to rely on you to provide regular food for them.

Deterring foxes

The dangers that foxes pose to people are very small indeed, and the nuisance they may cause is usually short lived. The London Wildlife Trust believes that foxes are important to our wildlife and should be tolerated instead of persecuted. If you need put them off an area, we recommend you take the following humane and effective action.

- Make sure that it is really foxes that are causing the problem. Pets or other animals could be responsible.
- Remove possible sources of food such as scraps from compost heaps, fallen food from bird tables, or bin liners full of kitchen waste. If this is not possible, make sure that the foxes cannot reach the food by building some sort of barrier.
- Make sure that small pets and chickens are housed in strong hutches or enclosures and that foxes cannot dig their way in.
- If foxes are visiting your vegetable patch, fence off their favourite food with netting and place chicken wire just under the soil to protect the bulbs.
- If foxes have made a home in your garden, use strong-smelling repellents and then carefully block access to their earth. First of all, place strong-smelling repellent at the entrance to the earth. After a few days, lightly block the entrance with soil, so that the vixen (female fox) can dig out and remove any young foxes that might be living there. Once you are sure that foxes are no longer using the earth, you can block it up more securely.
- Discourage foxes from entering your garden by making sure that fences do not have any gaps.

Follow the 'fox code'

Local authorities do not have to control foxes. The London Wildlife Trust asks local authorities, pest-control companies and individuals to follow the 'fox code' so that people and foxes can continue to live alongside each other.

- You should never kill, trap or transport foxes to solve a nuisance. This is cruel and will not normally work as other foxes will quickly take over the territory.
- If foxes are causing a serious nuisance, use the humane methods described in this leaflet to deter but not harm them.
- We should aim to live in harmony with foxes and other wildlife and be pleased that foxes have adapted to life in towns and cities.

More information

- **'Urban Foxes'** by Stephen Harris (Whittet Books)
- **'Running with the Fox'** by David Macdonald (Unwin Paperbacks)
- **The Fox Project** funds the following advice lines.
 - Deterring foxes: 01892 826222
 - Dealing with sick foxes: 07778 909092
 - Identifying foxes, and information on foxes and pets: 01892 824111
 - Fox Project (administration line): 01892 824111

General deterrents and repellents available from most DIY shops, garden centres and hardware stores

‘Scoot’

For use as a plant or lawn spray where foxes are digging.

‘Get off my Garden’

A general purpose repellent for use at ground level or underground, and can also be used directly on plants.

Ultrasonic Animal Chaser (Ultrasound emitter)

Gives off an off-putting high-frequency sound which should only be heard by certain animals, including foxes.

Human Urban Wildlife Deterrence

Helpline: 01732 357355

Fox advice organisations

The Fox Project

The Lodge

Kings Toll Road

Pembury

TN2 4BE

Phone: 01892 824111 11am to 3pm

Website: www.foxproject.org.uk

National Fox Welfare Society

135 Higham Road

Rushden

Northands

NN10 6DS

Phone: 01933 411996

RSPCA

Website: www.rspca.org.uk

Phone: 0300 1234999

Rochford District Council

Council Offices, South Street, Rochford,
Essex SS4 1BW

Phone: **01702 318111**

Email: customerservices@rochford.gov.uk

Website: [www.rochford.gov.uk/pest control](http://www.rochford.gov.uk/pest_control)

If you would like this information in large print, Braille or another language phone us on

01702 318111