

Urban foxes

The council do not provide a service for the removal of foxes, although it does provide advice about how to deter them from your garden.

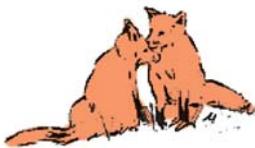
The red fox is a wild member of the dog family. Its colour varies from yellow/orange to dark red/brown and it stands just over one foot high at the shoulder, being about the size of a lightly built terrier and slightly heavier than a cat.

Behaviour

Foxes live in family groups which may include additional non-breeding vixens helping to rear the cubs. The family group will often stay together until the cubs leave in the autumn. Foxes hold territories of varying sizes and are generally nocturnal, although they can often be seen in daylight.

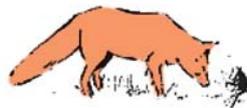
The Fox Year - a month by month guide to fox activity and behaviour

January



The start of the mating season and so the peak travelling time.

February



The main travelling time ends. Vixens start to look for a breeding earth.

March



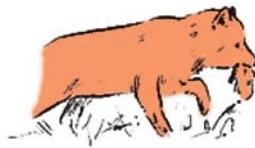
The birth of cubs occurs after a 53-day pregnancy.

April



The cubs first emerge from the earth.

May



The young cubs start to learn through play, and to eat solid food.

June



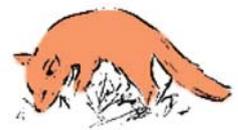
The breeding earth is abandoned, so you see foxes moving around, travelling and playing.

July



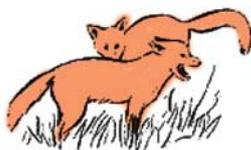
The cubs lie up in a sheltered position above the ground.

August



The cubs begin to forage for themselves and sleep apart from the adults.

September



Adults and cubs now look similar.

October



Fox families start to separate.

November



Young adults take over the territories of dead or weak parents.

December



Foxes defend their territories as the mating season approaches.

Habitat

Foxes are extremely adaptable and are very well suited to urban environments. Often they are perceived to be colonising new areas when they are simply continuing to inhabit existing territories while development proceeds around them, “boxing them” into smaller spaces so you tend to see them more often.

In suburbia, foxes tend to prefer areas of low density housing with large, relatively undisturbed gardens. Overgrowth may provide cover during the day but the most common breeding sites are under garden sheds.

Diet

Urban foxes have a varied diet which may include earthworms, insects, small mammals, birds and household scraps which are often deliberately provided by householders. They often bury food to prevent other animals from taking it and to conserve it for use when food is scarce.

Deterring Foxes

If you are certain that your problems are being caused by foxes it is usually possible to reduce the level of nuisance by taking some simple steps to make your property less attractive to them.

1. Use bird feeders or a high bird table rather than putting bird food on the ground, and clear up any fallen scraps. Do not leave pet food outside either.
2. Cover compost heaps or use bins, as compost is a good source of insects and other food.
3. Store rubbish securely before putting it out for collection, and use bins with secure lids rather than plastic bags.
4. Stop using bonemeal or similar fertilisers as the smell often attracts foxes.
5. Clear overgrown areas and accumulations of rubbish or rubble during the winter as these provide cover for foxes and may encourage them to remain in your garden.
6. Block access under sheds. This can be done with weld mesh secured to the bottom of the shed and dug into the soil to a depth of 1 foot. Do not do this between February and July.
7. Ensure that air bricks leading under your house are in good repair.
8. Secure fencing and block any gaps.
9. If foxes are visiting your vegetable patch, fruit canes or bushes, fence these off with netting. Chicken wire buried just under the soil can be used to protect bulbs.
10. Keep pets in secure hutches made from weld mesh rather than chicken wire, with locks that cannot be knocked open, and a solid floor so that foxes cannot dig underneath.
11. Bring toys, shoes, etc. inside at night as cubs like to chew these items and may take them away to play with.

- 12.** If foxes are digging or making an earth in your garden, discourage them at the first signs of activity. First it is important to make absolutely sure no foxes are below ground before permanently blocking any holes. Do this by discouraging the fox with repellents soaked onto pieces of wood or rags placed in the holes and/or soaked onto 'sharp' (builders') sand around the entrance. After a few days lightly block the entrance with soil which can easily be pushed out if the earth is occupied. When you are certain that the holes are not occupied, fill with bricks or heavy materials that will be difficult to dig out.
- If you think you may have an established earth in your garden, or you suspect that the foxes may be suffering from disease, it may be advisable to seek advice from a private pest control company.

- 13.** Research has shown that non-toxic chemical repellents are sometimes effective in reducing nuisance from foxes when they are used correctly. Scent neutralisers can discourage foxes from fouling specific areas. All repellents must be renewed regularly, especially in hot weather and after heavy rain.

'Scoot' can be used to deter foxes from digging and fouling on lawns. It should be diluted and sprayed onto the lawn where the problem is occurring.

'Get Off My Garden' is a solid repellent and can be used to deter repeated digging or fouling in specific areas. It should be placed in the holes which foxes are digging, or in other areas to which foxes pay particular attention.

'Wash Off' is a scent neutraliser and can be used to discourage repeated fouling and urinating on hard surfaces by removing the fox's scent so that it cannot mark the area successfully.

All repellents must be used according to the manufacturers' safety instructions. The repellents listed above are generally available in garden centres and hardware stores. The inclusion of these products is for information only and is not intended as an endorsement or recommendation of them by Wandsworth Council.

Common questions

Would culling reduce the problem?

No. If foxes are removed from an area, remaining vixens produce greater numbers of young and vacated territories are quickly re-occupied. In some cases activity may even increase as social organisation is disrupted and new territories are established. Environmental management and humane deterrence are considered to be much more effective control measures than culling.

Are foxes dangerous?

Foxes will normally run away if threatened but may defend themselves if cornered. Foxes may attack pets such as rabbits which are kept outside, as small mammals form part of their natural diet. Owners should ensure that their pets are securely housed. Foxes are unlikely to attack cats or dogs. Although there have been a reported instances where foxes have been spotted fighting with cats, it is more likely that an adult cat will see off a fox easily.

Do foxes spread disease?

Foxes suffer from the same diseases as cats and dogs, although disease transmission from foxes to pets is very unlikely. Foxes in some areas suffer from mange which is highly contagious and nearly always fatal to foxes. Dogs are much less susceptible to the disease and can be treated with a medicine that kills the mites. Reports of mange in foxes often turn out to be simple hair loss due to the normal moulting process which begins around April. Foxes lose much of their fur in large patches and can look very thin and scruffy until the winter coat comes through in autumn.

Concern has been expressed about transmission of *Toxocara canis* to children. Fox faeces as with dog faeces should be removed from gardens where children play in order to minimize any risk.

Rabies is not present in the UK, and France and much of northern Europe have been free of rabies for some time. However, special control measures would come into force immediately in the event of an outbreak in the UK.

Should I feed foxes?

Foxes breed according to the amount of food available it is therefore suggested that householders do not feed foxes to avoid encouraging them further. The population in Wandsworth suggests there is already an abundance of food, and their adaptability ensures that foxes are usually able to find sufficient food even in winter. High levels of fox activity can cause severe nuisance to some householders, including repeated and extensive fouling of gardens and damage to property. If your neighbours are finding foxes a nuisance then you should not feed them. Feeding may also cause foxes to lose their natural fear of humans and bring them into close contact with people who may be frightened or act aggressively towards them.

Are foxes protected?

Foxes are not a protected species. You are liable to prosecution should you do anything which causes cruelty to animals, including foxes. It may be considered to be cruel to shoot, snare, poison or use dogs against foxes.