

# **Foxes**

## **Advice leaflet about Foxes**

Foxes are very adaptable animals and they will live anywhere they can to find food and shelter from the deserts of Africa to the Arctic. In Britain, foxes can be found in the countryside and in towns. They are the same species and are identical in all respects. However it would be illegal to catch urban foxes and then release them in to the countryside.

### **Problems**

Foxes hunt for earthworms and insect larvae on lawns on warm wet nights during the spring and autumn, causing damage. To prevent this use an insecticide to kill the worms and leather jackets in the lawn. However, in drier weather, the foxes will look for other food sources.

Cubs playing in the late spring and early summer mainly cause trampling of the garden. They can do considerable damage to flowerbeds and the lawn. The foxes den will be close by so all entrance points to the garden will have to be secured.

### **Is the urban fox a different species?**

No, in fact, urban and rural foxes may even be one and the same animal. Foxes born in cities may disperse to the country, and vice versa. Foxes born in a city have been known to move more than 20km out of the city, to take up residence in rural habitats.

### **Do urban and rural foxes look different?**

No, you often hear stories that urban foxes are greyer, and have coats in poor condition or foot problems from walking on concrete all the time. These are all myths. One of the many myths currently prevalent is that large numbers of urban foxes are being caught and released in the countryside.

### **Why do foxes live in our cities?**

Foxes are found anywhere they can find food and shelter, from the deserts of North Africa to the Arctic. Since foxes have exploited every other suitable habitat, it would be surprising if they had not become city-dwellers.

### **Is the Fox a Friend or Foe?**

Many people derive pleasure from having foxes in their neighbourhood where they feed on rats, mice and feral pigeons. Most encounters with other large animals, such as cats, result in the two animals ignoring each other, or the cat coming off best! They are only a threat to small family pets such as rabbits. Ensuring they are protected in fox proof housing will prevent harm.

## **Health Hazard**

Foxes are prone to a variety of diseases, virtually all of which occur in domestic dogs. Of particular concern is sarcoptic mange, which results from infestation of the skin by one of two species of mite. This causes irritation or loss of fur and serious cases may ultimately cause the death of the fox. There is evidence in some circumstances that the disease may be passed from foxes to dogs, however, the condition is treatable in domestic dogs by a veterinary surgeon.

Many fox organisations will provide food additives free of charge or at minimal cost, which can control mange in foxes.

On the continent the fox is the major wildlife reservoir of rabies. This disease is passed on by the bite of an infected animal when saliva containing the virus enters a wound. It is fatal to foxes, humans and other mammals. The UK is currently free of rabies and our strict quarantine regulations are designed to prevent it from entering the country.

## **Diary of a Fox**

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.

July - The cubs lie up in a sheltered position above 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 break up and spread out into new territories.

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

December - Foxes defend their territories as the mating season approaches.

## **Prevention in domestic areas**

### **Fencing**

It is possible to deter foxes by using fences although this is not always practical. A barrier at least 2 metres high is required ideally with a 30-cm overhang at the top and 30 cm buried in the ground.

## Repellents

If you really do not want foxes in your garden then a chemical repellent is the most efficient deterrent. There are a number of commercial animal repellents but only those approved for use against foxes should be used. The use of wood preservatives or disinfectants as repellents is illegal. The use of electronic deterrent devices, such as are advertised in newspapers etc. have been tested by the Advertising Standards Agency and found to be ineffective.

Much can be done to discourage foxes from using dens by creating noise and disturbance in the vicinity. This must be done with care so as not to disturb your neighbours to, as this would need to be done when the foxes are active. When it is thought that the foxes have gone, sticks should be placed across the entrance. If these remain undisturbed for a few days the hole can then be blocked with rubble. Care should be taken when approaching a den especially during the spring as cubs may be present and adults may be very protective.

## Fox Groups

Further information and advice about foxes and mange is available from the following groups:

- The National Fox Welfare Society. Tel: 01933 411996 or [www.nfws.org.uk](http://www.nfws.org.uk)
- Fox Welfare Trust. Tel: 01933 411996
- The Fox Project. Tel: 01732 367397
- Mange Helpline. Tel: 0906 272 4422 (calls cost 25p/min)
- 

**\*\*FOXES MUST NOT BE POISONED\*\***

The Environmental Health Department does not offer a control service for foxes.

Some private pest control contractors listed in the Local directory will carry out treatments; we are unable to comment on the effectiveness, cost or availability of any company or individual.