

# Living with Foxes









Lambeth Council do not provide a service for the removal of foxes, although we do 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 1 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

<p><b>January</b></p>  <p>The start of the mating season and so the peak travelling time.</p>	<p><b>February</b></p>  <p>The main travelling time ends. Vixens start to look for a breeding earth.</p>	<p><b>March</b></p>  <p>The birth of cubs occurs after a 53-day pregnancy.</p>
<p><b>April</b></p>  <p>The cubs first emerge from the earth.</p>	<p><b>May</b></p>  <p>The young cubs start to learn through play, and to eat solid food.</p>	<p><b>June</b></p>  <p>The breeding earth is abandoned.</p>

<p><b>July</b></p>  <p>The cubs lie up in a sheltered position above the ground.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p>  <p>The cubs begin to forage for themselves and sleep apart from the adults.</p>	<p><b>September</b></p>  <p>Adults and cubs now look similar.</p>
<p><b>October</b></p>  <p>Fox families start to break up and spread out into new territories.</p>	<p><b>November</b></p>  <p>Young adults take over the territories of dead or weak parents.</p>	<p><b>December</b></p>  <p>Foxes defend their territories as the mating season approaches</p>

## 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.

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.

- Use bird feeders or a high bird table rather than putting food on the ground, and clear up any fallen scraps.
- Cover compost heaps or use bins, as compost is a good source of insects and other food.
- Store rubbish securely before putting it out for collection, and use bins with secure lids rather than plastic bags.
- Clear overgrown areas and accumulations of rubbish or rubble as these provide cover for foxes and may encourage them to remain in your garden.
- Stop using bone meal or similar fertilisers as the smell often attracts foxes.
- 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.
- Ensure that air bricks leading under your house are in good repair.
- Secure fencing and block any gaps.
- If foxes are visiting your vegetable patch, fruit canes or bushes, fence these off with netting. Chicken wire just under the soil can be used to protect bulbs.
- Keep pets in secure hutches made from weld mesh rather than chicken wire, with locks that cannot be knocked open.
- Bring toys, shoes, etc. inside at night as cubs like to chew these items and may take them away to play with.
- If foxes are digging or making an earth in your garden, discourage them at the first signs of activity. First make certain that the holes are not occupied.
- 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.
- 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.
- All repellents must be used according to the manufacturers' safety instructions.
- Repellents are generally available in garden centres and hardware stores. The inclusion of these products on this site is for information only and is not intended as an endorsement or recommendation of them by Lambeth Council.

## **Common Questions**

### **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.

### **Should I feed foxes?**

Foxes breed according to the amount of food available it is therefore suggested that householders do not feed foxes and avoid encouraging them further. 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.

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