

## Guidance on the Control of The Red Fox

Title	Information and Control of The Red Fox		Author/Owner	D Lewis	
Document	Guidance	Issue Date	Oct-14	Version	1.0

## THE RED FOX – INFORMATION AND CONTROL ADVICE

The red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), commonly referred to as the urban fox, is one of the most adaptable mammals on earth and inhabits a wide range of environments from the Arctic Tundra to the deserts of North America. It is therefore no surprise that they are now a resident in many cities throughout the UK. Although classed as predators, foxes are lazy and prefer to scavenge for food, and towns provide the ideal environment for them to thrive. Although foxes are now more numerous than they were ten years ago, current research suggests that London's fox population has reached its maximum limit and that the risk in complaints and number of sightings is due to a change in the fox's behaviour and this may be due to people feeding them. Fox populations are self limiting and are influenced by the availability of food and territory, in fact the average age for a London fox is 2 years, with road traffic accidents being responsible for 60% of all fox deaths.

### Can the council remove foxes?

Foxes have not been classified as vermin by DEFRA and therefore the council does not have a responsibility to remove them. Controlling urban foxes is a contentious issue and as of yet there is no solution to the problem as any attempts to remove them have shown that it is temporary and numbers soon return to their previous level it is for this reason that we do not recommend that people contact private pest control companies for fox removal. The fox is usually killed and whilst the premises may remain fox free for a few months, sooner or later they start to experience problems again. However Islington council does realise that foxes cause a problem for many residents, schools and day centres and this leaflet is designed to provide people with information on how to live with foxes and how to deter them.

### Do foxes attack people?

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Generally foxes are scared of humans and given the opportunity will run away. However a fox may bite to defend itself if cornered. If a fox wanders into the premises it is going to be confused and scared, leave all of the doors open and it will probably flee as quickly as possible. Occasionally foxes approach houses and cat flaps as they have gotten used to approaching people for food, they are unlikely to be aggressive and are usually just being inquisitive.

## **Feeding foxes**

It is not illegal to feed foxes, but there are issues that must be considered in feeding them. Feeding foxes can reduce their territory to 10% of its former range, and this can lead to other premises experiencing problems. There is also a risk that feeding foxes may attract other animals such as mice, rats and pigeons which can pose a threat to human health. Therefore we do not advise that anyone feeds urban foxes.

## **Do foxes pose a health risk?**

Like all wild animals foxes do carry some diseases, but the risk to human health is very small. The most common disease is mange, this is caused by a small mite that burrows under the skin causing intense irritation to the fox, and it can be fatal to the animal if left untreated. Dogs are also susceptible to mange but the risk to humans is extremely small.

They can also carry roundworm (*Toxocara canis*) which is found in dog, cat and fox faeces, and which can cause toxocariasis in children. The risk of catching this is low but precautions should be taken to minimise the risk. When removing fox faeces always wear gloves and use tools that are only designated for that task. If you come into contact with faeces wash the area immediately and if you have any concerns you should contact a doctor.

## **What to do if you find an injured fox?**

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If you find an injured fox you should call the RSPCA or one of the fox organisations on the back of this booklet. It should be borne in mind that foxes frequently receive minor but visible injuries, so although you may see one with a limp, it is still able to function perfectly well, and the best course of action may be to let it heal naturally.

### **What to do if you find an orphaned fox cub?**

It is not uncommon for foxes to leave their older cubs unattended, sometimes for quite lengthy periods and only return briefly to feed them, so do not immediately assume that the cubs are orphaned or abandoned. If the cubs are lying quietly they are probably being cared for; when they are hungry they will start making plaintive barking noises. If you think they are deserted, DO NOT TOUCH THEM. If the cubs are all together and hungry then the mother may have been killed, but if it is a single cub it is much more likely that it has strayed and can not find its way home. If you are absolutely convinced that there is no mother then contact one of the organisations on the back page of this booklet.

### **Deterring foxes from gardens**

There are several steps that people can take to make their premises unsuitable for foxes. It is important to remember that when deterring foxes from your premises you must be consistent and persistent in your approach. It may take a while, but eventually the fox will get the message that they are not welcome and move on. It is also important that you continue to use the garden areas of your premises. Many people do not like foxes and stop using their gardens once the foxes move in, this just makes the fox feel more safe and secure as there is very little disturbance. If you continue to use the garden regularly you are less likely to have foxes nesting in there.

- Secure your garden – Ensuring that the fences surround your garden areas are secure which can greatly reduce the problems that you are experiencing. Foxes can get through very small gaps so ensure that all potential access points are blocked up.

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- Extending your fence – consider extending your fence (above and below ground) as foxes burrow. Before you make changes to your fence please consult the planning department to ensure any changes meet with their approval.
- Remove all potential food sources.
  - Make sure that your rubbish is disposed of properly, preferably in a wheelie bin, if this is not possible use a bin with a secure lid.
  - Clear away all windfall fruit
  - If you are feeding birds only use bird tables that have a roof or feeders that can be hung up
- Keep your gardens tidy
  - Foxes are attracted to overgrown gardens as these provide a safe sheltered environment for them to rear their cubs.
  - If your neighbour's gardens are overgrown you should speak with them and if they are having trouble with the upkeep of the garden due to age then Age UK may be able to help. They can provide volunteers to help with the garden providing the person that puts in the request has the appropriate tools. There may be a small charge for this service. They can be contacted on 020 7701 9700
  - Tidy away all toys, tools, gloves and shoes, anything that smells different is interesting to a fox cub and they usually take them away and hide them.
  - Ensure all sand pits are covered over with either a plastic lid or with tarpaulin which is weighted down.
- Prevent access to sheds
  - Sheds, greenhouses and garages are ideal for foxes as they are quiet, warm and usually undisturbed. If you do not want foxes to utilise these areas it is important that you site them correctly. Always build them on a concrete base as this will stop a fox from digging underneath it and keep all doors and access points closed when they are not in use.

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- Gaps below garden sheds should be proofed to prevent access by foxes. This can be done with weld mesh secured to the bottom of the shed and dug into soil to a depth of 1 foot.
- Ensure that air bricks leading under buildings are in good repair.
- Commercial deterrents
  - In cases where foxes are causing a persistent problem commercial deterrents may help, it is important that you only use products that have been approved for use against certain animals as it is illegal to use ones that have not been. The most commonly available product is called 'Get off My Garden' this should be used in accordance with the instructions on the packet.
  - Clear overgrown areas and accumulations of rubbish or rubble as these may offer shelter or accommodation for foxes or a breeding earth and may encourage them to remain in the garden area.
- Sonic Fox Deterrents
  - Electronic control devices which emit a high-pitched noise that is audible to animals but no humans can be purchased. This acts as an irritant which drives animals away; however there are no scientific studies have found this an effective method of animal control.
- Scarecrow Motion Activated Deterrent System
  - The ScareCrow motion activated sprinkler automatically detects foxes as they approach and repels them with a short but startling burst of water. The sudden noise, movement and spray scare animals away. Greenwich University have carried out experiments using this equipment to deter foxes which have proved effective.

## Common problems and solutions

- Noise – January to February is peak mating season for foxes and this tends to be when people get disturbed by their calling.

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- Fouling – Foxes foul in gardens to scent mark their territory, the same way that dogs will scent mark particular areas on their walks. If they are fouling concrete areas, cleaning with bleach only temporarily masks the smell, so they are still likely to return to the same place. Use biological washing powder mixed with hot water or an enzyme based product from the vet.
- Digging – Digging is usually a problem in the summer months when the foxes, particularly cubs are looking for insect larvae. Commercial deterrents may help, and some allotment holders have reported that lightly crushed garlic cloves can be effective in deterring foxes from particular areas. Also avoid using fertilizers on vegetable patches containing fish blood or bone meal, as these confuse the fox into thinking that there is food buried in the area.

### **Disposal of foxes**

There are only two methods that can legally used to dispose of foxes:

- Shooting – This option is far too dangerous to be used in urban areas. We do not want to encourage people to walk around our streets, gardens and parks carrying and discharging firearms. However some companies will offer to trap foxes and then take them away from your premises to be shot. Again you need to be mindful that you will be charged for the cost of shooting the animal and disposal of the body.
- Cage trapping, in combination with the administering of a lethal injection – the costs of trapping and giving a fox a lethal injection is in excess of £500 per fox. In addition, only a vet can administer a lethal injection and most vets are unwilling to put down a healthy animal.
- Some companies offer the service to trap foxes and to relocate them into the wild. However relocating urban foxes into the wild is illegal and vice versa. This is deemed inhumane and can encourage the spread of disease.

The above are options for getting rid of foxes however newly-vacated territory is quickly occupied by other foxes, often within days. Moreover,

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killing simply brings about less competition for food and territory and the mortality rate for the remaining foxes will decline.

Opinion seems to be equally divided about foxes, with as many people calling for their protection as call for them to be eradicated. What many people fail to understand is that it is our lifestyle which is one of the key things that attract them into the city. The abundance of food and shelter to be found here, combined with an absence of predators means that foxes are able to thrive in the inner cities.

**NB** You should not trap foxes inside their den. It is cruel and illegal to do so. Nor should you be tempted to lay poison or put out poisoned food for foxes. To do so puts other people and wildlife at risk. Moreover, the penalties for doing so are considerable and those who do flout the law risk heavy fines and possible imprisonment.

**Useful contacts:**

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| Willow Wildlife Rescue  | 07956 472 284   |
| The RSPCA   | 0300 1234 999<br><a href="http://www.rspca.org.uk">www.rspca.org.uk</a> |
| National Fox Society<br>135 Higham Road<br>Rushden<br>Northants                             | 01933 411996<br><a href="http://www.nfws.org.uk">www.nfws.org.uk</a>    |
| The Fox Project<br>The Southborough Centre<br>Draper Street<br>Southborough<br>Kent TN4 0PG | 01892 545468<br>07778909092<br>01892 514863 (Deterrence line)           |
| British Pest Control Association  | 08706 092687  |

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