

Foxes in Bexley





The red fox is a wild member of the dog family. It's 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.







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.

The Fox Year

<p>January The start of the mating season and so the peak travelling time.</p> 	<p>February The main travelling time ends. Vixens start to look for a breeding earth.</p> 	<p>March The birth of cubs occurs after a 53 day pregnancy.</p> 
<p>April The cubs first emerge from the earth.</p> 	<p>May The young cubs start to learn through play, and to eat solid food.</p> 	<p>June The breeding earth is abandoned.</p> 
<p>July The cubs lie up in a sheltered position above the ground.</p> 	<p>August The cubs begin to forage for themselves and sleep apart from the adults.</p> 	<p>September Adults and cubs now look similar.</p> 
<p>October Fox families start to break up and spread out into new territories.</p> 	<p>November Young adults take over the territories of dead or weak parents.</p> 	<p>December Foxes defend their territories as the mating season approaches.</p> 

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 food on the ground and clear up any fallen scraps.
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. 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.
6. Ensure that air bricks leading under your house are in good repair.
7. Secure fencing and block any gaps.
8. 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.
9. Keep pets in secure hutches made from weld mesh rather than chicken wire, with locks that cannot be knocked open.
10. Bring toys, shoes, etc inside at night as cubs like to chew these items and may take them away to play with.

Discouraging foxes - Repellents

You can discourage foxes with repellents.

1. 'Scoot' and 'Stay Off' are repellents which 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.
2. '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 to.
3. 'Wash Off' and 'Get Off' are scent neutralisers 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.
4. 'Silent Roar' these are pellets soaked in essence of lion dung and are then dried and sterilised. They can be spread over areas affected by cats and foxes that have marked their territory with urine. It acts a warning that a larger predator is in the area. These pellets can last up to three months depending on weather conditions.
5. 'Sonic & Water Repellents' there are several types of each available. The sonic versions emit a high frequency noise that is only audible to cats, dogs and foxes and similar animals. The frequency of the sound is high for human hearing (some children can hear them). Water repellents work by attaching a water supply to a water jet which is activated by a Passive Infra-red sensor. When an animal walks within range of the sensor the jet triggers and it is sprayed with water.

All repellents and other products must be used according to the manufacturers' safety instructions.

The products 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 the London Borough of Bexley.

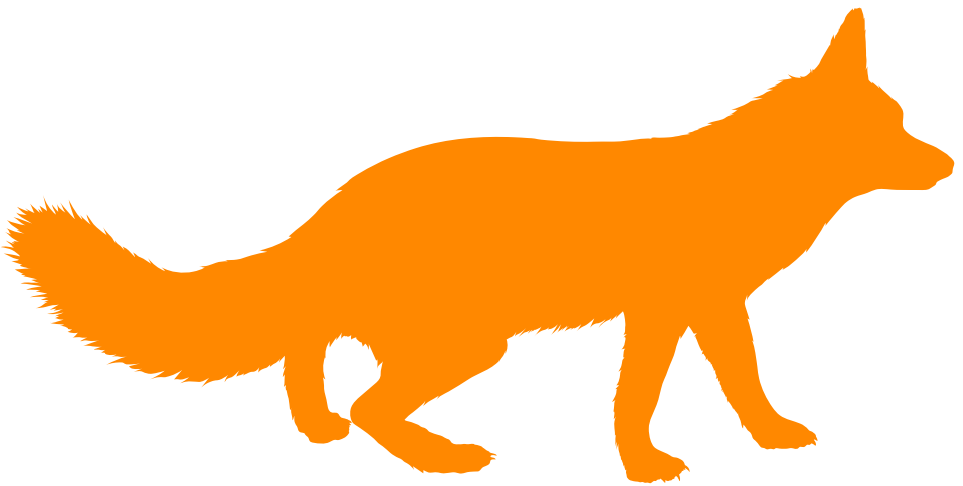
After a few days of repellent use lightly block the entrance with soil which can easily be pushed out if the earth is occupied. When you are certain that the holes are not occupied, fill with bricks or heavy materials that will be difficult to dig out.

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.

Common questions

Would culling reduce the problem?

The London Borough of Bexley ceased control of foxes in 1985, largely in response to independent research showing that culling or removal of foxes had little effect on numbers. 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 and avoid encouraging them further. The population in Bexley 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?

You should not shoot, trap, snare, poison or use dogs against foxes. It is inhumane, dangerous and you could be prosecuted.

Useful contacts

Planning and Regulatory Services, Civic Offices, Watling Street,
Bexleyheath,
Kent DA6 7AT

Advice on injured or diseased foxes and the law in relation to foxes

- The RSPCA, Tel: 0300 1234 9999

General information on foxes

The RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG

Tel: 0870 101 1181

The London Wildlife Trust, 80 York Way, London N1 9AG

Tel: 020 7278 6612

