

FOX FACTS: A Briefing On Urban Foxes



Fox Facts ...

Some people enjoy seeing and perhaps feeding foxes in their gardens. Others are not keen on foxes, worrying about their presence or finding them a nuisance. As a consequence of foxes becoming bolder in our streets and media coverage of foxes as a danger, Environmental Health have experienced a high level of enquiries from the public, Elected Members and MSPs regarding the risks foxes pose or how they can be deterred from gardens.

It must be appreciated that there is no legal duty for Councils to control foxes and a recent survey found that currently no Council in Scotland does so. It would be both expensive and time consuming with little effective result. Control normally involves trapping them and the traps would have to be checked at least daily. In any event it has been proven that if an area is cleared of foxes, other foxes soon move into it.

Environmental Health in South Ayrshire currently do not deal with foxes.

Our advice on the most asked questions is below.

What is the risk to children?

Foxes are wary of people and would normally run away to avoid adults and children. They will learn to trust people who are not causing them harm and may appear quite bold – but this is unlikely to be a sign of aggression. There is a much reported case in July 2010 when a fox allegedly attacked two young girls while they were asleep in their upstairs bedroom in London.

Fortunately, it is very unusual for foxes to attack humans.

It is possible to get mange from foxes and dogs, but the risk from foxes is very low, as direct contact is the most likely source of infection. Another disease risk is from the roundworm (*Toxocara canis*) found in dog, cat and fox droppings, which can cause toxocariasis in children. Remove any faeces and use a repellent to reduce the risk of these animals fouling in your garden. However, the risk of children picking up this parasite from fox droppings appears to be extremely low. If you have any concern about these and any other potential health risks from animals, contact your doctor.

What is the risk to cats?

Both cats and foxes are abundant in towns and active at night, so the low number of incidents of foxes attacking cats clearly shows that most are at little or no risk from foxes. Foxes and cats have also been observed through night vision equipment. The animals usually either ignored each other, or the foxes were chased away or were nervous of the cats. Research that looked at 1,939 fox droppings collected in Oxford over a seven-year period, found only eight contained traces of cat fur. But even the presence of cat fur does not mean foxes kill cats. Foxes are scavengers and may eat from the carcass of a cat killed by road traffic.

Can I block a fox earth I have found in my garden?

If you find a fox earth in the garden, don't block it unless you are sure it is empty. To check, lightly block the entrances with loose soil or sticks, through which a fox can easily break out. If after a few days the holes are still blocked, pack them more thoroughly with soil. Take great care in the spring to avoid blocking cubs into an earth – instead block earths between late summer and late winter.

Why do foxes howl at night?

Foxes call throughout the year, but normally only howl or scream during the mating season, which peaks in January. During the mating season, it may be worth considering the use of ear plugs if the howling disturbs you.

How can I deter foxes from using my garden?

Foxes are opportunists, searching for and defending areas with suitable food and shelter. The most humane and long-term solution to discourage foxes from your garden is to remove or prevent access to what attracts them to the area.

Remove access to any potential food supplies

- Only provide food for wild birds on fox-proof (roofed) bird tables or in feeders.
- Protect fruit and vegetable crops – use fencing or a frame of netting; using at least 4cm mesh to reduce the risk of other wildlife getting tangled in the netting.
- Clear away windfall fruit.
- Use securely sealed dustbins and composters.
- Keep pet rabbits etc in secure enclosures, and put a roof on any pet or chicken-run. Enclosures should also have a weld-mesh front secured with a good lock that cannot be worked loose. Also clear up any spilled pet food on the ground.

Remove places of shelter

- Cut or clear any areas of long grass or dense vegetation – dense cover can provide a safe, sheltered location for a fox to lie up undisturbed during the day.
- Keep garage, greenhouse and shed doors closed.

- Prevent access to areas under sheds – these can provide ideal shelter or a location for digging an earth to raise cubs.

Deter foxes from the garden

- Put up fencing or plant prickly plants around the garden.
- Use a proprietary animal repellent approved for use with foxes.
- Repellent products are widely available from garden centres or hardware stores. Take care to read the label and closely follow the instructions, as each product is prepared and approved for use against certain animals in the specified way. It is illegal to use any substance to deter foxes that has not been approved for such use.