



## **Deterring Foxes Advice**

We receive a number of contacts regarding foxes, so have compiled the below for help.

Foxes are not classified as vermin and we follow the London Fox Code, published by the London Wildlife Trust, which states that 'foxes are a desirable part of London's wildlife heritage and control is unnecessary. Control will only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances.' We have yet to come across any exceptional circumstances.

We are not aware of the number of foxes increasing over the years, but they have steadily lost their wariness of humans and have changed their natural nocturnal behaviour due to food being available for them at all times of the day – this has resulted in them being more visible during the day and has also resulted in them venturing closer to humans and even into houses. They may seem to be totally fearless, but they are not – they know they can run a lot faster than we can which is why we can sometimes get closer to them than in the past, but they will not approach closely and will run from humans if we get too close.

It is difficult to remove foxes as they are territorial and removing one or a pair from an area will see other foxes very quickly claim the vacant territory as their own. They breed in numbers to replace those lost during the previous year and the population is largely self-regulating. Using poisons to kill them would be a risk to humans, pets and other wildlife, and ineffective for the reasons stated above. Putting down contraceptives is untried and would again pose a risk to humans and pets. Urban foxes live an average of 2 years, and are therefore replaced on a regular basis, so currently having a fox or foxes in the garden which are relatively unwary of humans does not mean this will continue – the next fox to take over the territory may well be very wary.

Incidents of foxes attacking dogs and cats are extremely rare, although they have been known to attack small pet animals such as rabbits and chickens etc. Attacks on humans are virtually unheard of and apart from the attack on twin babies a couple of years ago have not been substantiated. This contrasts with the hundreds of people who require hospital treatment for dog bites each year. Foxes can suffer from mange, but this is only passed to humans via close contact with an infected animal. They can cause a nuisance from fouling in gardens, but this will not pose a public health issue provided normal hygiene practices are followed having been out in the garden, particularly when removing faeces, although if foxes do foul in a garden care should be taken with domestic pets as they can pick up worms (as they can from dog and cat faeces which they may encounter elsewhere).

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 bird food on the ground and clear up any fallen scraps. Do not leave pet food outside either.
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 bone meal or similar fertilisers as the smell often attracts foxes.
5. Clear overgrown areas and accumulations of rubbish or rubble during the winter as these provide cover for foxes and may encourage them to remain in your garden.
6. 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. Do not do this between February and July.
7. Ensure that air bricks leading under your house are in good repair.
8. Secure fencing and block any gaps.
9. If foxes are visiting your vegetable patch, fruit canes or bushes, fence these off with netting. Chicken wire buried just under the soil can be used to protect bulbs.
10. Keep pets in secure hutches made from weld mesh rather than chicken wire, with locks that cannot be knocked open, and a solid floor so that foxes cannot dig underneath.
11. Bring toys, shoes, etc. inside at night as cubs like to chew these items and may take them away to play with.
12. If foxes are digging or making an earth in your garden, discourage them at the first signs of activity. First it is important to make absolutely sure no foxes are below ground before permanently blocking any holes. 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. 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.
13. 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.

'Scoot' 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.

'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.

'Wash Off' is a scent neutraliser 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. All repellents must be used according to the manufacturers' safety instructions. The repellents listed above are generally available in garden centres and hardware stores. The inclusion of these products is for information only, further information can be found online and is not intended as an endorsement or recommendation of them by The Regulatory Services Partnership.