

Urban Foxes – Control Advice
Compiled by Crawley Council Environmental Services Division

Why do foxes live in Towns?

The red fox is a native relative of the dog and common throughout Britain. There has been a rapid spread of foxes into urban areas during the 20th century, particularly in the south of England. Like people, foxes prefer suburban housing with large gardens where they can find shelter under shrubbery, sheds, and in secluded corners. Foxes shelter in burrows known as earths or dens. An active den can easily be identified as it is likely to be surrounded by an untidy array of food remnants, faeces and miscellaneous items. Well worn paths to the entrance, which is about 25 cm wide, and a decidedly unpleasant musty smell, will betray the recent presence of foxes.

Noise

Foxes may be heard 'screaming' during the mating season in December and January. In late August and September fox cubs leave their dens and prepare to find new territories of their own. Vixens (female foxes) may be heard calling loudly as they lose control of their cubs. The cubs may be heard squabbling over food and rights to new territories. These sounds are usually only heard for a few weeks. If you are kept awake by foxes try turning on a light, making a sudden noise or opening the door. Usually these sounds and movements will scare a fox away.

Damage to gardens

Around February vixens look for a place to have their cubs. They may enlarge a hole under a shed, dig under tree roots or into compost heaps to create an 'earth'. Overgrown gardens are attractive to Vixens looking for a place to have their cubs as they provide shelter and plenty of cover. In August and September there are lots of cubs trying to find food and new territories for themselves. They may dig up plant bulbs and create holes in lawns looking for insects to eat. The cubs like well-maintained gardens as digging for food is easier and there is more space for play. Blocking off the underside of sheds and removing piles of debris and compost heaps before the breeding season will encourage them to look elsewhere. Careful use of deterrents (see later) can protect a garden and cause the foxes to move on (please follow manufacturers instructions carefully).

Damage/removal of toys and shoes

During August and September, when the cubs are preparing to move on, toys, shoes and other garden items made of rubber or leather are attractive to foxes. This is part of the fox's learning process and normally only lasts a few weeks. They are exploring new objects, playing and finding out what is good to eat. Make sure these objects are shut away before sunset.

Damage to refuse bags

Rubbish from refuse bags scattered around is often blamed on foxes, although the cause of this is more often cats and birds than foxes. Keep your waste in a bag inside a dustbin with a sealed lid and don't put refuse bags out until the morning of collection.

Injury to Pets

It is unlikely that a fox will attack a dog or a cat. However, if you keep small animals or birds in your garden then you will need to protect them. Ensure that their cages are stoutly built of strong materials and kept in good repair.

How can they be controlled?

The law prevents the use of poisons to control foxes nor can they be shot in towns. If foxes are trapped and removed from their territory, it will quickly get re-occupied by foxes moving in from elsewhere, unless other steps are taken.

1. Deny them an easy food source:

- Keep your rubbish in bins until the day of collection. Make sure your bins have lids on (secure lids with bungee straps if needed).
- Do not put out large amounts of bird food. Use special bird feeders rather than putting food on the floor.
- Do not feed your dogs and cats out of doors.
- Do not use bone meal fertilisers in the garden.

2. Deny them territory:

Repellents such as Renardine, Scoot, Get off my Garden, and others can be obtained from good garden centres or DIY/hardware stores. As with any chemical, follow the instructions for safe use. Use where foxes:

- Foul repeatedly (remove the fouling first)
- Enter your garden (usually over or under fences)
- Have the entrances to earths (the ground where foxes live)
- Might be seen resting or foraging for food.

When using chemical repellents you are effectively "scent-marking" your territory as a fox does and competing to win back your garden. Foxes will not leave an attractive territory easily and problems with scent marking may get worse before they get better. You will need to be persistent in continually removing a fox's droppings and regularly using chemical repellents in order to succeed.

This information is provided as advice only. The Council does not provide a service to deal with foxes. Further advice on deterrence and control of foxes can be obtained from the Fox Project - www.foxproject.org.uk