



Foxes in the City

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We have an active population of red foxes that have adapted well to the urban way of life. While these animals can be fun to watch, they can also cause problems for people.

FOX FACTS

- Foxes live an average of four years in the urban setting, and usually breed from January to March.
- Gestation is about 52 days, and 6 cubs is the average litter size. The parents share duties, and the cubs are weaned at about five weeks. Cubs leave their parents in the fall.
- Adult foxes are usually most active at dawn and dusk, but will often be seen sunning during the day. The pups are often active throughout the daytime.
- Fox are territorial and a pair will occupy an area of about four square km. Competition for available natural den sites sometimes forces the fox to create a den in a residential area.
- The fox is omnivorous. Its diet includes small rodents, amphibians, reptiles and insects, as well as nuts, grasses, vegetables and fruit. Fox will also go after small domestic animals such as rabbits and cats. During late spring and early summer foxes are seen more often because they hunt and forage more to feed their young.
- In Ontario, the fox is reported as a carrier of rabies. However, across Southern Ontario, foxes have been very successfully vaccinated against rabies by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The ministry advises that the removal of foxes from one area will open up territory for unvaccinated fox to move in and potentially reintroduce the rabies virus.
- In the city, foxes will live along riverbank, beach, ravine, and woody stream areas. If left undisturbed, foxes will sometimes make a den in residential areas, under decks or sheds or where there are a lot of bushes or shrubs. Generally, the fall is a good time to make building repairs that prohibit wildlife.

THE PROBLEM

When foxes do not feel threatened by people, they will live near homes and apartments. People often are afraid when they see these animals on and around their property. It is important to know that the only reported, unprovoked attack by a fox on a person was by a rabid fox. Our fox population in the Region of Waterloo is well protected against rabies. This is especially important because the urban fox is less fearful of people and occasionally may come very near a person.

The best solutions:

- Closely watch small, domestic pets when they are outdoors, or if possible, keep them inside.
- Enclose areas underneath patio decks and sheds and other places where foxes may make a den. To keep foxes from burrowing under these sites, dig a trench around the base of the structure and use galvanized heavy wire screening as a "prevention skirt". The screening should go at least 20 to 30 cm. straight down and 20 to 30 cm., angled 90° outwards underground. Backfill the area with dirt. If you pile rocks or other items over this area against the structure, the animal can burrow around the wire mesh barrier.
- Get rid of piles of rock, wood or debris. These attract small animals such as mice.
- Foxes will eat garbage and pet food left outdoors.
 - o Store garbage in animal-proof containers.
 - o Take garbage containers to the curb on the morning it is picked up - not the night before.
 - o Use composters that are enclosed (rodent-proof).
 - o Do not place pet food outside.
 - o Do not feed foxes!
 - o If you feed birds, the seeds can attract squirrels, which foxes prey on. To discourage foxes, do not feed birds.
 - o Keep small, pets indoors, especially cats and rabbits. Note: If a person, adult or child, is outside with a small pet, a fox may still approach.
- In early spring, spend more time in your back and side yards. Foxes will be more likely to visit or look for den sites near a home where people stay indoors most of the time.
- If you see a fox in your yard or anywhere they are unwelcome, make loud noises directed at the animal. To chase the fox away, spray it with a garden hose. Loud noises and a squirt from a hose will not physically harm the animal but will make it feel unwelcome.

EVICTING A DEN OF FOXES

Keeping these animals from moving in should be your first step, but the following ideas will help discourage and evict unwanted foxes:

1. If you are not sure foxes are using a den site, look for fox fur and food remains nearby.
2. Encourage foxes to leave on their own by making the den site unlivable.
 - o Dig up the ground around entrances to the den.
 - o Play a transistor radio tuned to a talk station at the entrance to the den. Turn the volume up loud.
 - o Place dog hair in and around the site.
 - o Place dog or human urine soaked rags in and around the den.
3. When you are sure eviction is complete:
 - o Secure the hole to prevent re-entry. Make sure that all boards or galvanized heavy wire screening extend at least 20 to 30 cm straight down and 20 to 30 cm angled 90° outwards underground. Foxes are excellent diggers and continuing the barrier at a 90° angle makes it much more difficult to dig under. Tip: using wire is better, skunks give up sooner.
 - o Backfill the area with dirt.
 - o Repair siding and holes in buildings.
 - o Place wood or wire screening around the base of porches and buildings as a prevention skirt. Ensure that you cover these areas to at least 20 to 30 cm straight down and 20 to 30 cm angled 90° outwards underground.
 - o Eliminate piles of rock or debris and stack woodpiles neatly to eliminate holes.

TRAPPING, HUNTING AND POISONING

Live trapping using a humane trap has proven to be ineffective with foxes. Leg hold traps may only be operated by Ministry of Natural Resources licensed trappers. Illegal use of leg hold traps, discharge of firearms or use of poison can result in criminal charges and fines up to \$5,000.

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR

Foxes that are protecting their young, or injured and sick foxes, may behave strangely. If you see a fox growling and attempting to attack people, larger animals or inanimate objects, call the Kitchener-Waterloo Humane Society or Police as soon as possible. Also, make sure other people or animals are safely away from the fox, and if possible, watch the animal from a safe distance until the Animal Control Officer or the Police arrive.

IN SUMMARY

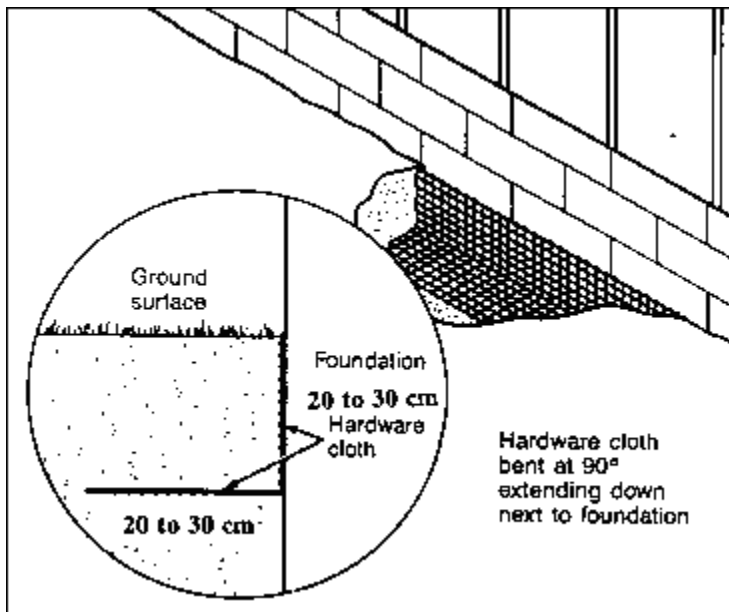
Many wild animals including fox have adapted well to life in the city. Because food and shelter are usually plentiful and natural predators are limited, these animals will continue to live in our midst. If we can learn how to share the environment with them and reduce conflicts by eliminating sources of food and shelter on our properties, we can enjoy watching these animals as they make their way to a more suitable home.

PREVENTION SKIRT

Here's the best way to enclose areas under patios, decks, sheds and other places where animals may make a den.

To keep animals from burrowing under these sites, dig a trench around the base of the structure and use galvanized heavy wire screening as a "prevention skirt" (red dashes in the diagram). The screening should go at least 20 to 30 cm straight down and then be angled 90° outwards away from the structure for another 20 to 30 cm, underground. Backfill the trench with dirt.

If you pile rocks or other items over this area against the structure, the animal will dig under them and make a home between the rocks and the prevention skirt.



Original article courtesy of the [City of Toronto](#).