

I Have a Fox in My Yard/Neighborhood



We frequently get calls from people worried because they've seen an adult Red Fox in their yard or neighborhood or perhaps they even have a Fox den with kits (baby Fox) under their deck or shed. So if this happens, what should you do?

To start, don't panic! You can coexist peacefully with the Fox in your yard or neighborhood. Many people with whom we've worked over the years initially called us in a panic and ended up finding the Fox family to be a true joy to watch.

So let's start with some basic Fox information....

Adult Red Fox only weigh between 6 and 15 lbs. (less than many people's cats!). As a result of their small size, their prey items are also relatively small with most prey consisting of mice, rats, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and small birds. About the largest prey item they take is an adult rabbit (which weighs 2 – 2-1/2 lbs.) and they are typically taking smaller prey than this, so you generally don't need to worry about your dog or cat unless you have puppies, kittens or a pocket-size dog that is left out unattended. We do not recommend you ever leave your pet out unattended just as a good matter of practice – neighborhood Fox or not! Red Fox also eat things like berries as they are omnivores.

Red Fox are generally crepuscular – meaning that they are most active around dawn and dusk. You may see Fox during the day or at night, however, and seeing a Fox during the day isn't indicative of a problem.

Red Fox are adapted to urban environments and often live and den near highly populated areas. We have followed many Fox dens in highly populated areas including in Chicago.

Red Fox mate in the winter and the Fox kits are typically born in late March to April. The kits are born in a den, which is commonly an abandoned Woodchuck hole or under a deck, porch or shed. There are usually between 4 and 10 kits with 4-6 kits being most common. The kits are born with their eyes closed and they won't emerge from the den until they are about five weeks old. Their fur is initially dark brown and will turn to reddish as they get older.

As the kits emerge from their den, they start a process of socializing. The kits will play together and Mom and Dad Fox will hunt and bring food back to them. Eventually, the parents will teach the kits to hunt on their own and the family will start to make more frequent and longer trips from the den site. This is the time that you are most likely to see Fox in your yard if the den is nearby. Kits at this age haven't yet developed their natural fear of people, but it's extremely important that you stay away from them, keep your pets away from them and just observe the kits from a respectful distance. Also, never reach your hand into the hole/entrance to a den!

There are typically two dens so that the adult Fox can move the babies between the dens in order to avoid danger. When the kits are young, the Mom and Dad will pick up each kit in their mouths and carry it to the new den location.

So how do you live peacefully with the Fox in your yard? Follow these basic steps:

1. Never feed them. Feeding wildlife breaks down the natural fear barrier and brings wildlife closer to humans. Adult wildlife, including Fox, are naturally afraid of people and this natural fear is important for their safety as well as human safety. A vast majority of human/wildlife conflicts occur because someone fed the wild animal and it became habituated to humans.
2. If you feed feral cats or you feed your pet outdoors, be sure that you clean up any spilled food and don't leave the food out past daylight hours.
3. If Fox kits are outside playing, do not approach them and keep children and pets a respectful distance away.
4. Don't reach into the entrance hole of a Fox den.
5. Walk outside and clap your hands several times before letting your dog out. This will alert wildlife to take cover.
6. Cover window wells.

Remember that Red Fox, like other native mammals, are protected by Illinois state law. As a member of the public, you cannot interfere with them or their den in any way. As a member of the public, it is also illegal to trap and relocate them....so sit back and enjoy!