

Let's Look at Foxes: Part 2

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The red fox's success owes to being extremely adept at living amongst human activity. Besides the previously mentioned land clearances in [Part 1](#) of this series, they walk along roadsides usually without getting hit by vehicles. While strolling on paths and sidewalks, they leave scat in the most conspicuous places as territorial markings; these deposits are often mistakenly blamed on small dogs and negligent owners. When pursued by predators, foxes run through creeks to mask their odor.

Some red foxes lack the shyness associated with other wildlife, even denning in urban backyards. When folks spot unwanted denning activity, persistently chasing off the fox with loud noises usually does the trick.

Plan B is to place ammonia-soaked rags around the site. Never use mothballs or other poisons since they have detrimental impacts to many other organisms including small children.

Questions always turn to how people should behave around foxes. Popular videos show people playing with wild foxes, but these were mostly filmed in either the United Kingdom (UK), where rabies was eradicated, or Russia, where foxes on fur farms were bred for easy handling and near domestication. Although some videos may show foxes behaving like pets, first and foremost is that people should never handle or corner wild animals. Folks wanting to be an animal rehabilitator must go through the training and licensing process. Rehabilitators working with foxes, skunks, raccoons, bats, and other critters at high rabies risk take initial rabies vaccinations. Getting the full rabies vaccination series after being bitten by a potentially rabid animal can cost thousands of dollars. Any animal having a mind altered by an advanced rabies infection will act abnormally, obliterating any preconceptions on temperament or behavior.

Tips to avoid human-fox conflicts include always removing any extra food—especially pet food—from the outdoors. Keep household trash for curbside pickup in hard containers; leaving food and kitchen waste outside only in plastic bags invites foxes, raccoons, and other scavengers to rip in, chow down, spew trash, and later come back for more. If a fox frequently tears into a garden, sprinkle pepper-based deterrents and/or lay chicken wire fencing (with smaller openings than the



Figure 1. This photograph shows a red fox by a fence dividing developed private property and natural parkland. It symbolizes the fox's story: a species that utilizes open urban areas while sheltering in woodlands.



Figure 2. Several decades ago, a now former KPW resident thought he/she was doing wildlife a favor by feeding them and opening the house to critters. Rather than living a Disney fantasy, various scavengers made a huge mess of the property, which required restoration. The adjoining parkland needed bulldozer excavation to dig out the massive rat colony. Though overgrown, the earth-mover's trenches (in the foreground) still scar the land.

paw to prevent possible entanglement) flat over the ground across that area, which usually takes a month or two to break the habit. Healthy foxes unconditioned to humans usually pose no threat to people or pets that are larger than a rabbit. Animals that associate people with free meals could become problematic and demand food. Never lure foxes with food for a photograph; many reputable wildlife publications clamp down on this baited photography technique and will not publish the images. Once foxes find a food source, they tend to return and can become a nuisance animal. One person might want foxes within close range whereas a neighbor could have other feelings, but a fox conditioned to humans will not know the difference. When pest controllers capture any animal, including foxes, it is euthanized and not relocated or released into a captive facility without special permits. Relocated animals sometimes find their way back, can spread disease, cause overcrowding at the release site, and strain resources. Even in the UK, a caught nuisance fox is dispatched. As the saying goes, "Fed wildlife is dead wildlife."

Whereas the cuteness factor influences many people's opinions, giving preferential treatment to the adorable red fox is unfair to the endearing rabbits, noble turkeys, or potentially [unseen wildlife](#) that a large fox population annihilates. The best policy for people and foxes living in harmony is to leave the foxes alone, keep a safe distance, and let nature take its course. Respect the fox for the charismatic, clever, majestic, cool, and wild animal that it is.



Figure 3. One of the highest compliments a wild animal can give to a backyard habitat is snoozing in it. Without any food bribing it into the yard, this healthy fox settled for a nap before going on its way.

Further reading:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/stewardship%20brochures/foxcad.pdf>

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/what-do-about-foxes>

<https://blog.nwf.org/2018/04/what-to-do-when-foxes-move-in/>

<https://www.foxesworlds.com/foxes-and-humans/>

<http://www.wildlife-removal.com/foxdangerous.html>

<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/nuisance/foxes/>

<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/urban/>

<https://www.howmuchisit.org/human-rabies-shot/>

ADDENDUM: Learn more about foxes in [Eco-Article 103b: What's Around a Fox Den? \(December 2020\)](#)

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