FOXES

The British Red fox is now a common sight in all urban areas and
Redbridge is no exception. Living close to humans the fox can
cause a range of reactions amongst residents; some loathe them and
others love them. Because of the abundance of available food in
urban areas, fox density in towns and cities is often much higher
than it is in rural areas, where food is more difficult to come by.

Fox Myths

- Contrary to popular belief, the fox population in most urban
areas is now pretty stable, having reached its peak many
years ago. Towns and cities can only sustain a maximum
number of foxes. This population density will rarely increase
or decrease as it is limited by the availability of both a food
supply and suitable habitation.

- The fox has a call, which sounds a bit like a human scream, and this often frightens people during
the night. However this is no more than a mating call and is usually only problematic in mid winter and as
females are only receptive for a few days it soon dies down.

- Concerns about the spread of mange are often an issue. However this is canine mange, and cannot harm
cats or humans. It is only passed on by direct contact and is easily cured in dogs and foxes. The mange
mite lives in foliage, so removal of infected animals will not create a mange free environment.

The Legal Position

The killing and control of foxes is restricted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wild
Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 makes it an offence to intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering on any wild
mammal. In urban areas there is no poisonous substance authorised for use for foxes and the setting of traps
may cause harm or suffering to non target species such as cats and dogs. It is also an offence to use any form
of firearm in a residential area.

Fox Control

Controlling urban foxes is extremely problematic. In addition to the legal restrictions above, the
practicalities are enormous and physical control measures are seldom effective. Given that other control
methods are either illegal or considered inhumane, many local authorities have in the past tried to reduce
their urban fox population by trap and release methods. Such methods have generally been unsuccessful,
due to the fox's inherent and well earned reputation for cunning.

Fox Population

The urban fox population reached a state of natural balance many years ago, and because an area can
only sustain a maximum density, foxes will naturally regulate the size of their own population. There is
currently already an annual mortality rate amongst urban foxes of about 50%, mostly as a result of road kills.
Were this mortality rate to significantly increase through the use of legitimate control measures, the
population gap would very soon be filled by other foxes moving into the area, until food and habitat
had reached a maximum sustainable level again.
Foxes will also compensate when environmental pressures and competition for food are reduced, by increasing the number of vixens that can breed in order to populate again to this natural density. When foxes are killed or removed from their territory other foxes quickly move in to take over control. This invariably leads to rivalry and fighting over territory, with the resulting noise and territorial scenting of gardens with faeces and urine.

The disruption caused to the urban fox population by removing or destroying foxes may therefore give rise to even more nuisance and disturbance than was experienced before such action was taken. Therefore physical control of the urban fox is most unlikely to achieve the desired results.

**What you can do to reduce nuisance from foxes**

- Find out if the fox is attracted to your garden by debris, rubbish or a compost heap.
- Check your boundary fences for any holes that make access easy for foxes (However foxes are extremely good climbers).
- Once you have found out why the fox is attracted to your garden you can discourage it by moving any debris or rubbish, repairing garden fences, raising the height of any bird tables and not leaving bird or other animal food out overnight.

Other ways you can help are:

- Do not leave refuse sacks out over night.
- Tie refuse sacks securely and place them in a dustbin.
- Arrange to maintain a neighbours garden if they are elderly or disabled because foxes will often hide in neglected gardens.
- You can also use a proprietary repellent which will produce a scent, which foxes do not like. Repellents that may help are “Get Off My Garden” and “Wild Animal Repellent”. You can buy repellents from garden centres, pet shops and agricultural merchants. Please follow the manufactures instructions carefully.
- Foxes live in earths and may dig one in your garden. You can take action to remove the foxes, but take care during March and April because there might be newborn cubs inside that could be deserted and left to slowly die from starvation. However, apart from these months you can place repellent granules inside the earth every other day, and when you are certain the fox family has moved away, you can then safely block up the entrance to the earth.

*Redbridge Council does not provide a service for destroying or trapping foxes. You should not shoot, trap, snare, poison or use dogs against foxes, it is inhumane and you could be prosecuted.*

**Contacting the Service**

You can receive further advice on foxes by contacting the Pest Control Service.

You may also wish to contact: The National Fox Welfare Society on: 01933 411996, for further information.