



Pest Control Services Advice Sheet

Living with the urban fox



London Borough
of Hounslow

Why are foxes here?

Foxes have adapted well to life in towns over the last 50 years or so. They are now found across London and other cities in the UK. They prosper because they find plentiful food and shelter in our gardens, yards and other open spaces. Their diet is varied and will include insects and grubs, slugs, worms, small rodents, and indeed anything that they can raid from our rubbish. They have become so successful that some estimates put the population in London at as many as 10,000 foxes!

Are they a nuisance?

There is no doubt that foxes can cause considerable nuisance. They can damage lawns and gardens when digging for worms, they scent mark their territories with strong smelling droppings and urine, and at certain times of the year their mating calls can be very loud and distressing. They can also raid rubbish bags and bins spilling the contents.

However, despite this many people positively enjoy the experience of encountering the urban fox even to the extent of encouraging them to gardens by deliberately feeding them.

Do they carry disease?

Yes. Foxes can carry toxocara which is a disease organism that can also be carried by domestic dogs and cats. They might also carry fleas and internal parasites such as worms. However, there is little evidence that these can be passed on to humans or their pets.

Can they be controlled?

The law prevents the use of poisons to control foxes leaving only trapping or shooting as possible methods of control in urban areas and there are problems with both methods. However, if foxes are removed from their territory this will quickly get re-occupied by foxes moving in from elsewhere. With possibly 10,000 foxes in London alone it would take enormous resources to control them all using this method and it is just not practicable. In the past, widespread control measures taken across London over many years failed to make any impact on the overall fox population.

As foxes cannot be controlled conventionally without the input of enormous and expensive resources, or without upsetting other residents, we must explore other means of dealing with nuisance.

Fox nuisance can be controlled by taking the actions suggested here. This will minimise any nuisance that they might cause whilst allowing others to enjoy the presence of these animals. More detailed advice on deterrence can be found on the Fox Project website or by calling their deterrence helpline (see contacts section).

Does the council have responsibility to control foxes?

While local councils have certain legal duties to control pests such as rats and mice there is no legal duty to control urban foxes.

What can I do?

1 Deny them an easy food source:

- Keep your rubbish in bins until the day of collection wherever practicable. Make sure your bins have lids on. You may need to secure the lids with bungy straps. Use your food recycling container and keep the lid locked shut. Wash out any other recyclables before storage or putting out for collection.
- 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:

Animal repellents can be obtained from good garden centres or DIY/hardware stores. As with any chemical product you must follow the instructions on the container to ensure its safe and effective use. Use repellents where foxes:

- foul repeatedly (remove the fouling first)
- enter your garden (usually over or under fences)
- have the entrances to earths (burrows in the ground where foxes live)
- might be seen resting or foraging for food

When using chemical repellents you are effectively “scent-marking” your territory much as a fox does and competing with it to win back your garden. You will need to be persistent in removing a fox’s droppings and using chemical repellents in order to succeed.

3 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.

Useful contacts

Natural England – www.naturalengland.org.uk

The Fox Project – www.zip-pix.com/foxp/index.htm

The Fox Project Deterrence Helpline 01892 826222

The Fox Website – www.thefoxwebsite.org/index.html

Cleansing Services – For reporting dead foxes on the highway within the Borough of Hounslow. 020 8583 5555 or email at cleansingservices@hounslow.gov.uk

The Animal Control Unit

The Animal Control Unit deals with most animal-related issues that fall within the local authority's remit. Its work falls into three main areas:

Pest control

The provision of direct services to control certain pests such as rats, mice, cockroaches, fleas, bedbugs, wasps, ants. Please note that some of these services are charged for. The provision of information and advice on other pests, and the investigation of complaints of pest activity.

Animal Warden Service

Stray dogs, dog fouling, complaints of nuisance regarding domestic animals, licensing of pet shops, dog breeders, zoos, animal boarding establishments, riding establishments.

Animal health

Livestock controls, identification and movement records, contingency plans to control the spread of diseases of livestock.

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