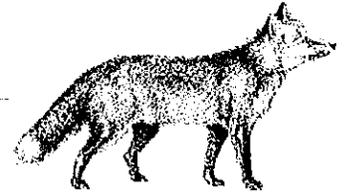


LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



That Sly Fox: Resolving Conflicts with Fox

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

Fox are becoming more and more prevalent in suburban and urban places. Conflicts with humans are minimal and fox do little to step on the toes of the human species. The following information provides tips on how to keep your pets safe and prevent fox from inhabiting your lawn or denning near your home.

General Information

Both red and gray fox inhabit New England. Although cat-like in appearance and hunting behavior, fox are from the *canid* family, as are coyote, domestic dogs, and wolves. Red fox weigh 7-15 pounds and are the larger of the two species (about 3 feet without the tail). Gray fox are smaller and usually weigh no more than 11-12 pounds. While it is not uncommon to confuse the two species by color since red fox can appear gray, and vice versa, a white-tipped tail indicates a red fox. Fox inhabit diverse habitats, and readily adapt to suburban and urban areas. They are omnivorous, and feed on a variety of animals and plants, including squirrels, mice, and fruits. Young fox are called kits and litters of 3-8 are born in the early spring. They will usually remain with their

parents, learning to hunt, until late summer or early fall.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Conflicts with humans are minimal and fox do very little damage. Often they are blamed for damage they did not do, but benefit from, such as spilled garbage. Fox are typically shy animals and usually retreat near humans. It is not uncommon, however, to see a fox in an area where they feel secure or

Make sure young are old enough to leave the den before trying to evict fox from under your porch or foundation.

in areas close to cover. Fox generally try to be active when humans are not. Although primarily nocturnal (active at night), fox are often seen in suburban or urban areas during the day.

Fox are also fairly transient animals and move from place to place often. Fox present no danger to humans unless they are rabid, which is rare, or if they are being captured or handled. If you catch a glimpse of a fox that appears healthy, enjoy the opportunity to observe this fascinating animal. If you notice signs of lethargy, stumbling, or erratic behavior, contact your local animal control.

Fox are becoming more and more prevalent in suburban and urban places. Human homes and yards provide fox with optimal habitat and food. In addition, humans often inadvertently invite fox and other wildlife to yards by leaving garbage in open containers and feeding pets outside. To avoid conflicts, feed pets inside or supervise outdoor feedings, making sure to clean the area and bring leftover food inside. A bird feeder can also draw a fox closer, as they will feed on the rodents that feed on the spilled seed. Temporarily bringing feeders inside if fox are in an area is recommended. Compost piles can also attract fox and should be kept in secure containers. Fox are cautious animals around people, and if you see one and want to discourage its presence, a loud voice and/or banging pots and pans together can frighten them.

Common conflicts with fox often occur in the spring when they are looking for denning sites and may build a den under a porch or shed. If a fox is denning under a porch or shed, tolerance for the family until the young are old enough to follow the parents out each night is recommended. Once the kits are seen playing and romping outside of the den, it is a sign they are maturing and will most likely be moving on soon. Mild harassment techniques can be used if needed to encourage a fox family to move on their own more quickly. Successful harassment techniques include

playing a radio close by, placing items with a strong human scent near the area (like dirty socks or old sneakers), using sprinklers in your yard, and/or putting up pinwheels and scare balloons. Once fox have moved on, follow up with the necessary exclusion work to keep the problem from reoccurring. Hardware cloth is often effective when critter proofing a deck or shed. It is important to bury the hardware cloth about 8 inches into the ground. Turn the end of the cloth outward in an L-shape to prevent fox and other wildlife from burrowing under it.

Supervising pets while outdoors is important as it is not uncommon for a fox to prey upon small domestic cats or kittens. Keeping cats indoors is the best preventative measure (which the MSPCA recommends regardless of whether

THE **LIVING WITH WILDLIFE** MISSION

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.

or not there are fox nearby). Special consideration should be taken for outdoor pets like rabbits and poultry, which will need to be protected with secure hutches or pens.

Public-Health Concerns

Fox are a rabies vector species (they are a primary carrier of one of the major strains of the disease). In certain areas of the country they can

also carry the echinococcus tapeworm that can cause disease in humans.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org or e-mail lww@mspca.org.