

Living with **FOXES**



**Yukon**

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LIVING WITH FOXES

1

Foxes are an important part of our ecosystem. They help keep insects, ground squirrels, mice and other small mammal populations under control. Foxes are also highly adaptable and resourceful and can thrive living close to people.

Many of us enjoy watching and coexisting with foxes in our yard or neighbourhood, but not everyone gets along with foxes. Foxes can and do cause conflicts with people: their dens become stinky, their activities can disturb backyards and gardens, and they don't always live in harmony with livestock and pets. Remember, foxes are still wild animals, but there are things we can do to ensure their habits don't come into conflict with our own. We can still enjoy the benefits of having foxes around us.





Photo : Steve Wilson

Understanding how we can minimize our interactions with foxes is important for the wellbeing of both foxes and people.

PREVENTING CONFLICT

Don't feed foxes

It's **never OK** to feed foxes. In the spring, foxes shed their fur, making them look mangy and thin. People often think the fox is starving and they may choose to “help it along.” However, the fox is likely healthy and just undergoing a natural, annual molt.

Feeding a fox only encourages it to stop eating natural foods and increases its chance of becoming a problem animal.

Reduce fox attractants

Human settlements can provide foxes with unnatural shelter and food. By addressing a few key issues, you can reduce the risk of foxes becoming problems.

- Store garbage, especially food waste and compost, in wildlife-proof containers or indoors.
- Harvest ripe or fallen fruit and berries.
- Clear overgrown areas of gardens.
- Clean up spilled birdseed from under feeders.
- Ensure foxes can't access food put out for birds or pets.
- Tightly block gaps under decks, sheds and buildings to make sure foxes don't make a den there.



FOXES AROUND YOUR HOME

If you have a fox in your yard, we recommend the following steps. Some situations are unique. If these measures are ineffective or if there has been an injury or property damage, contact a conservation officer.

Foxes in gardens

If you want to avoid having foxes in your garden, don't attract them in the first place. Clear away overgrown gardens that can provide resting areas, and make sure there is no food available. Compost heaps can attract rodents that foxes feed on. Don't use fertilizers like blood, fish and bone meal.



Photo : Heather Ashthorn, WildWise Yukon

If foxes are frequenting your garden, you can try to deter them using a variety of smelly commercial repellents. However, persistent re-application may be necessary depending on weather conditions.

Foxes and domestic animals

If foxes see an easy meal, they will try to get it. Given the opportunity, foxes will kill small domestic pets and livestock like rabbits, ducks and chickens. Unlike many predators, foxes have the habit of killing more than they need to eat, returning later for any uneaten carcasses. You need secure fox-proof accommodation to safeguard vulnerable pets and livestock, especially at night.

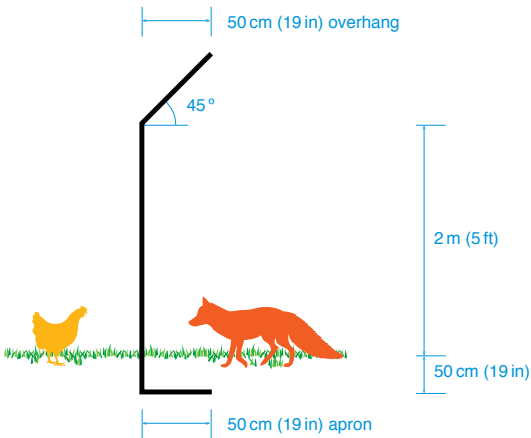
Foxes are excellent jumpers, climb well, have strong jaws and are powerful diggers. They can be very persistent, especially when they have had a taste of what is available. They can bite through ordinary chicken wire. A welded mesh enclosure with a welded mesh or conventional roof is a much stronger alternative.



Foxes can chew through low gauge welded mesh. Use a strong steel wire, or if using a low gauge wire select a mesh size of 1.3 x 2.5 cm (0.5 x 1 inches). Foxes will have a much more difficult time getting their teeth around this size.

A suitable welded mesh fence should be a minimum of two metres (six feet) tall, with a 50 cm (19 inch) overhang inclined at approximately 45 degrees. If you are unable to install an overhang, you can place “prickle” and “brickle” strips to deter foxes from climbing over fences.

A welded mesh apron should extend at least 50 cm (19 inches) from the base of the fence. The apron can sit on top of the ground, but a buried apron is better and requires less maintenance. The size of the mesh should be no larger than 4 x 3 cm (1.6 x 1.2 inches) so that juvenile animals can't squeeze through.



Fox-proof fencing: This is a plan for non-electrified fences to prevent foxes from getting into poultry pens. An alternative is to bury the apron wire at a 45-degree angle, rather than at the 90-degree angle shown above, or pave around the perimeter with the mesh running under the slabs. You can eliminate the need for an overhang and increase the security of the run by covering the top with mesh, completely enclosing the pen. Illustration not to scale.

The addition of electric fencing will significantly improve the security of your livestock and will also protect against bears. See the Government of Yukon's booklet *Reducing Wildlife Conflict with Electric Fencing: A Beginner's Guide* for more details on electric fencing. Electric fences can be a relatively inexpensive, safe and very effective means of protecting your domestic animals.

Breeding foxes usually seek shelter underground in an earth or den but may take up residence under decks, sheds or buildings if given the opportunity. A female fox, known as a vixen, gives birth to as many as 10 kits between March and May. These kits are born blind and don't emerge from the den for the first month.

The kits are entirely dependent on their parents for food for the first several months and multiple adult foxes may help feed and rear the kits. Initially, having a fox den on your property may not seem too bad, but in short order it will begin to emit foul odours from the remains of carcasses and feces.





Photo : Ryan Hennings

Foxes under decks or buildings

Fill in excavations as soon as they appear so you can stop foxes from moving in. Lightly block excavations with loose soil to ensure you don't trap any animals. If there is no further evidence of foxes using the den, solidly block all entrances.

If you discover the den too late, it's best to be patient and wait out the foxes. Foxes usually abandon dens by June or July, when the kits begin to learn how to forage for food.

To stop denning in the first place, install a buried mesh apron around new and existing outbuildings and decks. See the "Foxes and domestic animals" section on pages 5 to 7 for instructions on how.

Deterrents

10

Scent-based deterrents

There is a variety of effective scent-based products for deterring foxes. Successful use of these deterrents requires persistence. Foxes will not vacate attractive territory easily. Problems with scent marking may get worse before they get better, as foxes may initially increase their scent marking as they battle with you over this space. You may have to continually reapply the deterrent for some time.

Aluminium ammonium sulphate

Aluminium ammonium sulphate is a non-toxic ingredient used in popular fox deterrents. It works by mimicking scent-marking odours, leading foxes to believe another animal has taken over their territory so that they vacate the area. Aluminium ammonium sulphate is considered safe for use in gardens, on plants and edible crops, and is humane and biodegradable.

Citronella

Certain fox deterrent products have citronella as their main ingredient. You should avoid these products, as citronella can attract bears.

Ultrasonic deterrents

Ultrasonic deterrents use sound to deter foxes.

Some ultrasonic deterrents are activated each time a fox approaches, using body heat and movement of the animal to activate an ultrasound alarm calibrated to be extremely loud to foxes' ears but inaudible to humans. As the fox retreats the alarm stops. In this way, the fox learns to avoid the protected area. Other ultrasonic fox deterrents simply emit a random or permanent ultrasound signal regardless whether a fox is present. However, foxes may get used to the noise and eventually ignore it completely.

Sprinklers

Motion-activated sprinklers automatically detect foxes as they approach and repel them with a short but startling burst of water. These systems are frequently used to protect gardens. However, foxes may simply learn to tolerate or avoid triggering the device.







Photo : Ryan Hennings

ENCOURAGING FOXES TO ABANDON A DEN

If you can't wait out the foxes, you can try to get the foxes to move as a last resort. **However, it is unlawful to disturb the den of any wildlife without authorization from a conservation officer.** Contact your local conservation officer prior to proceeding.

Foxes usually have a secondary den that they can use. Forcing foxes to evacuate their primary den won't cause too much hardship for the family. However, it is better to wait until the kits are at least two months old.

To encourage foxes to abandon a den, thoroughly soak rags in repellent sprays or ammonia and then use a stick to push the rags into the den.

Physically disturb the entrance as much as possible while applying the repellent to the area. Five-litre sprayers are ideal for applying repellent, as they have a long lance that can get to hard-to-reach areas.

Scent marking communicates that someone has discovered the den and should push the foxes to move to a safe location. Installing ultrasonic deterrents at the entrance can also increase the chances of the foxes abandoning a den site.

If you don't have access to repellents, you can also try:

- Loosely placing straw, leaves, mulch, or soil in the opening. Replace the loose material each morning until it remains in place for a few days. At that point, the foxes have most likely moved along.
- Placing urine-soaked cat litter, mothballs, a sweaty T-shirt, or sweaty socks around the opening.
- Attaching polyester film balloons or flash tape in 45 cm (1.5 foot) strips to dowels or garden stakes 60 to 90 cm (24 to 36 inches) off the ground just outside the entrance of the den.

Whatever method you use, make sure all kits are out before you seal up the area to prevent future use.

Preventing future use of a den

16

To determine if the fox family has left, block the hole loosely with wadded up newspaper. Leave the barricade in place for two to three days. If it remains undisturbed, you can safely assume they have vacated the area. Alternatively, you can use a motion-activated camera to monitor the entrances to the den. Once you are certain that the foxes have gone, take steps to prevent them from returning.

Foxes do not like decks or sheds that have large openings under them. Keep these areas open and free of debris or enclose them with lattice or wire panels.



If you want to be absolutely sure that the foxes will not come back, securely fix welded mesh (not chicken wire) around the bottom of the decking or shed to cover the gap and lay down welded mesh as an apron surrounding the shed or deck, extending 50 cm (19 inches) out. If possible, bury the apron at least 50 cm (19 inches) below ground.

You can also block entrances with something like rubble or cement that will prevent the fox digging it out again. Only do this once you are certain a den is vacant. **You must never trap a fox in its den – this is cruel and illegal.**

Occasionally, foxes gain access to awkward, hard-to-reach areas such as under houses or under cabins. In such cases, you can try a one-way gate, which will allow foxes to emerge, but not let them back in. It works in a similar fashion to a one-way cat flap. You can purchase these gates from hardware stores or you can make one.

CLEANING UP AFTER FOXES

18

Odour

In some situations, fox odour can be a serious problem. Decaying carcasses that foxes drag into dens, feces and urine will continue to emit a foul odour long after foxes have vacated their den. You can try using odour-masking solutions in these areas. However, some areas under floorboards, decking, and sheds may be hard to treat.

Preventing these situations from occurring in the first place is the best approach.

Cleaning up feces

There are several parasites and diseases associated with fox feces. Always clean up feces as soon as possible to keep roundworm eggs from incubating.

When cleaning up feces, use a scooper and bag it. Don't touch fecal matter with your bare hands.

We recommend thoroughly disinfecting areas with disinfectant that is designed specifically for sanitizing areas fouled by canines. Dog owners can significantly reduce the risk of transmission of disease to their pets by doing this.

Foxes will often defecate in conspicuous areas as a further means of territorial boundary marking.

Spray repellent in these areas once you've removed the feces and disinfected the area.

Lawn damage

If your lawn is being damaged by fox urine, there are commercially available sprays to deal with this.

Trapping and relocating foxes should always be the last resort and done in the most humane way possible by trained professionals.

Preventing fox conflicts from occurring by following the steps in this guide is the best way to co-exist with foxes. Never shoot or attempt to trap a fox unless permitted under the *Wildlife Act*. Doing so is illegal and may jeopardize the safety of your neighbourhood.

If you are having issues with foxes and the guidelines in this book have been ineffective at resolving them, contact your local conservation officer or call the Turn in Poachers & Polluters line at 1-800-661-0525.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

20

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Old Crow	867-966-3040
Ross River	867-969-2202
Teslin	867-390-2685
Watson Lake	867-536-3210
Whitehorse	867-667-8005

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AND
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Yukon.ca/turn-poachers-and-polluters



24 hour • Anonymous • Rewards available

How you can help: If you see someone you suspect is violating wildlife or environmental laws, don't confront them and risk an unpleasant reaction. That's our job. You can help by watching carefully and recording the facts including:

- date and time;
- location;
- number of people involved;
- description of the people;
- description of the vehicle and licence plate number; and
- details of the violation or activity

When you reach a phone you can call a conservation officer or the TIPP line at 1-800-661-0525 and report the details of the offence. You'll be helping the wildlife conservation effort and you may be eligible for a reward.



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