

Foxes in the City

Vulpes vulpes

Identification:

Red foxes are a member of the canid family and are the largest of the true foxes, weighing 6 to 24 lbs. Thick soft fur and long legs often makes them look larger to people. Commonly a rusty red on top, they can be found in various shades and color of orange to gray and even black. Look for a white underbelly, black ear tips and legs, and a bushy tail with a distinctive white tip.



Natural history:

The red fox has the widest range of any carnivore; they are found throughout North America, Europe, Asia, N. Africa, Japan and have even been introduced to Australia. Red fox can be found in diverse habitats from forests, grasslands, mountains, deserts and adapt well to living around people.

Diet:

Foxes are solitary hunters whose diet is as varied as their habitat. Insects, small mammals, birds, snakes, fish, frogs, fruits, vegetables, garbage and pet food are all potential food sources. Big ears mean excellent hearing, and they can locate small animals by sound in tall grass, then make tall leaps to pounce on prey. Foxes will commonly “cache” or bury excess food in shallow holes to save for leaner times. Due to their small size, they eat 1-2 lbs. of food a day. Predation on pets is rare, most pets being too big for a fox.



Breeding:

Locally foxes breed in January to February, with 2 to 12 kits being born after almost a two-month gestation period in March through May. Kits are born blind, their eyes are open by two weeks and the kits have taken their first exploratory steps out of the den by five weeks; by ten weeks they are fully weaned. Both parents will raise the kits through the summer, until they disperse the following fall.

Urban foxes often stay together because of the large amounts of food and shelter available.

Behavior in urban environments:

Foxes become more nocturnal (active at night) in areas with a lot of people, and are generally crepuscular (out in the early morning and evening) but can be out at any time of the day. They are territorial, and will maintain several dens throughout their territory, with one larger den used for giving birth and raising kits. Dens are used every year and often passed on through generations. They generally avoid contact with people, but may initiate play with pets. They also have been known to “tease” dogs, barking and racing around outside of their reach. When a fox is fed, they can become too comfortable and bold around people. When this happens a fox is more likely to bite or be injured by dogs, cars or people. To keep foxes safe and away from people and pets, its best to chase them off and yell at them if approached.

Never pick up a young fox

From March through May young kits may be playing and wandering near their dens. Kits are dark, almost black and tiny when they first appear, often mistaken for kittens. Look for the distinguishing



white tipped tail to identify it. Unless an animal is obviously injured or in a location where they are likely to become injured DO NOT approach or pick them up. Parents often leave to find food, and the kits are fine until the parents return. Hundreds of young foxes are separated from their families in the spring by well-meaning and concerned individuals who pick them up, putting a strain on local wildlife rehabilitators and altering the chances of that fox

successfully finding its place in the wild. If danger is imminent, or a baby fox falls into a window well, use leather gloves to gently move it a short distance away and immediately stand back from it. Minimize handling and keep children and pets a respectful distance away.

Danger from foxes:

Danger to small pets is possible, although typically rare. Pets under 10 lbs. would be most vulnerable to predation. Foxes typically avoid human contact and are easily scared. If a fox approaches, yelling and waving your arms should frighten it off. When intentionally or accidentally fed, foxes can become aggressive. Remember that food means survival to wildlife and they will do what's necessary to survive. It is not uncommon for playful foxes to initiate play with dogs or cats.



Creating an aggressive fox

Benefits:

Foxes prey on grubs, insects, grasshoppers, mice, rats, voles and pocket gophers, helping manage pest populations. They will also eat Canada goose and duck eggs as well as other bird eggs. They can be entrancing to watch, and since they use the same dens for generations, a fox family can become a beloved part of neighborhoods as long as they're left alone. They provide opportunities for you to view and learn about wildlife and nature in your own backyard, while developing appreciation of the interesting, intelligent and playful antics of your furry neighbors. Enjoy them at a distance.

What to do when living with foxes:

It is illegal to feed foxes in Denver.

Never feed foxes

1. Do not leave pet food dishes out. Feed pets indoors.
2. Keep garbage and compost in securely closed cans or inside.
3. Clean up fruit that's fallen to the ground.
4. Clean under bird feeders and barbeque grills regularly.
5. Enclose poultry & rabbits in secure pens.

Make your yard unattractive to foxes.

1. Use flood lights or motion activated lights.
2. Human and pet activity will discourage foxes from entering yard.
3. Use ammonia soaked rags in trash cans or in areas where foxes have been visiting or trying to den in.
4. Play a radio.
5. Keep fence well maintained so fox cannot slip underneath it. Foxes can climb and jump 6 ft. fences. Other deterrents such as wire on top of fence may keep them from climbing over.
6. Trim vegetation high off ground to reduce cover.



1. If a fox enters your yard, yell, wave your arms or a broom, or bang on something to make noise to scare it away.
2. Be consistent, foxes are extremely intelligent and will learn locations where they are not welcome.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife does not allow relocation of red fox. Leave injured and abandoned wildlife alone.

Resources:

Animal Diversity Web: http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Vulpes_vulpes.html

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_fox

National Geographic: animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/red-fox.html

Urban Wildlife Rescue: <http://www.urbanwildliferescue.org/humane/foxes.htm>

Colorado Parks and Wildlife: <http://www.cpw>



Denver Parks & Recreation
Natural Resources Operations
Office of the City Naturalist

Wildlife Hotline: 720-913-0630