

Red Fox FAQs

I've seen foxes in my neighborhood during the day. Should I be worried?

It's commonly thought that a fox seen out in daytime must be rabid. That's incorrect. Foxes may go out in the daytime to play, find food or just bask in the sun. Although they're among the animals that can contract rabies, it isn't common.



Figure 1 Photo: Pixels by Toddc LLC

Red foxes are nocturnal (out at night), but they may be out and about any time. If they feel safe in your yard, they might visit it even in mid-day—especially if they have a hankering for, say, squirrel à la carte, a strictly daytime delicacy.

When humans are about, the foxes lay low. Those living in urban areas, however, can become so accustomed to humans they exhibit little fear when they come face to face with people. If you find a fox observing you from only a few feet away, don't interpret it as a threat because they're curious by nature. Some homeowners report a fox walking by as they do their gardening. The foxes are non-confrontational and make every attempt to avoid conflict. Unless cornered and forced to defend themselves, they won't attack humans, not even young children.

What do red foxes eat?

Red Foxes are considered to be carnivores, but in reality, their diet includes plant foods, making them more like omnivores, their diet includes rodents, rabbits, grasshoppers, beetles, crickets, birds and eggs, amphibians, reptiles, fish, earthworms, and caterpillars. Their hearing is so keen they can detect small animals digging underground.

There's a fox and fox kits denning in/near my backyard. I'm scared it will kill my cat, dog, or child. What do I do?

Red Foxes are animals of small prey, like mice, voles, even insects. The largest animal they will hunt is a large rabbit. Take note that a rabbit is not a predator like a cat or dog, it doesn't have the teeth, claws, or ability to hurt a fox like a cat or dog would. Through self-preservation and instinct, foxes know what is safe for them to hunt, they will usually avoid cats and dogs.



Figure 2- Photo: Pixels by Toddc LLC

Here in America Red Foxes are naturally elusive and timid. A normal healthy fox who is not habituated to humans will not approach humans or go after your child. They will actually do the opposite and try to keep a safe distance from humans. This is one reason why we do not advocate feeding wild foxes as it can lead to habituation of the fox, which can then lead to it becoming a nuisance. A fed fox is often a dead fox, as so the saying goes.

If you have a den in your backyard: enjoy it! Watch the young ones as they grow from a distance as to not spook them or the parents. They will begin venturing out of the den at 4 to 5 weeks old. Keep in mind that the parents have either 2 to 3 total dens, and she begins moving them around once they hit about 8 weeks old, or earlier if she feels the natal den is threatened. So, enjoy it while you can because they won't be around for very long.

If you do not want them to den again in your yard, after dispersal time in August - September you can consider fox proofing the area so they do not den again in that area.

Ok, I can wait until they leave my yard but I'd rather them not den again there. What do I do to discourage them from denning in my yard in the future?

- Hazing includes being loud and large. Yell and wave your arms while approaching the animal. Try using loud horns, whistles, banging pots together, or spraying water from a hose.
- Keep your trash cans closed. Rinse all cans and food containers going into recycle bins.
- Feed and water your pets inside and do not leave pet food or water outside.
- Keep your compost in closed bins.
- Remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Repair broken floorboards on porches and close up openings that lead under the house or sheds.
- Keep your pets inside and do not let them roam off leash.
- If you have cats outside, consider keeping them indoors, provide a screened in porch or catio for enrichment, or consider a cat fence with predator guard.
- Keep chickens/rabbits in good strong enclosures that are predator proof.

For more information, visit NJ Fish & Wildlife (<https://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/index.htm>)

Or call Mercer County Wildlife Center at 609-303-0552