

# WILDLIFE SMART

*The red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is a small member of the canid family, with adults weighing up to four kilograms.*



## COEXISTING WITH RED FOXES

*The red fox is typically a timid animal that tries to avoid interactions with people. However, the red fox is also very adaptable and able to live in urban, rural and wilderness areas. With red foxes living among us more and more, we need to learn how to coexist.*

*There are things you can do to reduce the risk of conflicts with red foxes. This fact sheet offers some helpful advice to protect yourself, your family, your property, and foxes.*

### THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RED FOXES

- Foxes are small members of the canid family, with adults weighing up to four kilograms. Their thick fur and long tail make them appear larger than they are.
- They may move around throughout the day, but are most active in the first few hours after sunset and in the morning.
- Foxes can be vocal, giving a single, loud and high-pitch scream, which they can repeat. This sound can be disconcerting if you don't know what it is.
- Foxes are omnivores, meaning they eat a variety of small mammals and birds, fruit, insects and other foods.
- They are attracted to food and food waste in people's yards, such as fallen fruit, pet food, bird seed and garbage.
- Foxes may seek cover and den in spaces under decks, sheds and patios or in brush piles, woodpiles or construction debris.

- Foxes are normally wary and unlikely to approach humans. However, if fed by a person, they can become conditioned to approach people and may appear to be a threat.
- They may prey on poultry, lambs, piglets and small pets.
- They can carry diseases and parasites that may infect people or their animals.



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# THINGS YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF CONFLICT

## Remove or secure things that can attract foxes

- Never feed wildlife. When food is available to foxes, either directly or indirectly (through feeding their prey), it may attract foxes and other predators to an area. Foxes that have been fed by people can become increasingly comfortable in approaching people, and may become increasingly aggressive around people.
- If you use a bird feeder, clean up any spilled seed frequently. Foxes prey on animals such as squirrels, mice and voles which can be attracted to the birdseed.
- Feed pets indoors and never leave pet food dishes outdoors. Odours from the food dishes may attract foxes and other animals.
- Clean up pet waste in your yard daily.
- Store garbage in a secure building or wildlife resistant container.
- Compost food items where they are inaccessible to foxes.
- In the summer and fall, remove all ripened or fallen fruit daily in the morning and before dusk. Don't allow it to accumulate and rot on the ground. Foxes eat fruit and may prey on other animals that come to feed on it.
- Fully enclose backyard beehives and chicken coops. Electric fencing can be an effective deterrent to predators.
- Clear out any yard debris and close off any openings under structures that could serve as a shelter for a fox or their prey (mice, voles, etc.).
- If you need to exclude foxes from a particular area, consider using fencing. Net wire fencing should have openings of eight centimetres (cm) or less. It should also extend at least 30 cm underground or have an L-shaped mesh apron that extends outward from the bottom, at least 30 cm. A roof of net wire or a 30 cm outward overhang at the top of the fence may also be required, because foxes are able to climb this type of fence. Electric fencing can also be used to exclude foxes: space three wires at heights of 15 cm, 31 cm and 46 cm above the ground. Combination fences that include both net wire and electric wires can also be effective.
- Let others know. Educating family and friends may prompt them to remove yard debris or potential food sources from their yards as well.

## Reduce risks for people

- When walking in an area that may include foxes, carry deterrents:
  - Things that make loud noises, such as a whistle or rattle (e.g., pebbles in a canister) can be effective deterrents.
  - A walking stick or umbrella can be an effective weapon. In addition, the sight and sound of an umbrella being opened can be a deterrent.
  - Consider carrying a few rocks that can be thrown toward the fox if it approaches you.
- When outdoors, be aware of your surroundings:
  - Do not wear ear-buds or earphones to listen to music outdoors in areas where you are likely to encounter foxes.
  - Be especially observant between dusk and dawn, when foxes and other predators are more active.
- Watch for signs of foxes in the area. Signs may include fox tracks or droppings. Pets may refuse to venture outdoors or show signs of fear.
- Learn appropriate hazing techniques, so you are prepared if you encounter a fox (see below).
- Supervise young children closely. Teach your children what a fox looks like, and what to do if they come across a fox (see below).
- Avoid physical contact with foxes and their droppings.
- If a fox appears sick or injured, make note of its location and report it to a conservation officer. Contact the local district office or call the TIP line at 1-800-782-0076.

## Reduce risks for pets

- Foxes have been known to attack small pets. Do not leave your pet outside unattended.
- Bring pets inside at night. If your pet must be let outside at night, use light and noise deterrents, including human presence, to increase its safety.
- Restrain (leash) your dog when walking it, to reduce the potential of it harassing a fox, or of being attacked by one. Unrestrained pets are at greater risk.
- Walk in areas with lots of pedestrian activity.
- Don't allow your dog to interact or "play" with foxes.

- Ensure your pet receives appropriate vaccinations. Talk to your veterinarian about your pet's vaccination needs.
- If your pet is attacked by a fox, use your walking stick, noisemakers, or throw objects at the fox to scare it away. Use a long pole or broom to separate the animals. Do not separate the animals with your hands as this could result in human injury.

### Reduce risks for livestock

- Properly dispose of deadstock.
- Use guardian animals and electric fencing to protect livestock such as sheep and goats.
- The use of a secure building for the birthing of livestock will reduce their risk of depredation.
- Maintain a frequent human presence.
- Work co-operatively with trappers in your area to target problem predators.
- Ensure that enclosures for rabbits or poultry are in good repair. Wire fence openings should be small enough to prevent animals from wiggling through. The bottom of the enclosure should be buried at least 30 cm underground to prevent animals from digging underneath.



*To decrease risk for small pets and livestock, ensure their outdoor structures are fully enclosed (including sides, top and bottom).*

### Use scaring devices in your yard

- The use of scaring devices can be effective, at least on a temporary basis. Foxes can easily become familiar with the presence, noise or action of these devices, making their effectiveness short-lived. To prevent habituation and prolong the scaring effect, change the type of device or move them around the property on a regular basis. Be considerate of your neighbours when choosing appropriate devices.
- Device options to consider include:
  - flashing lights such as strobe lights or rotating beacons at night
  - motion-activated devices: lights, water-sprayers and noise-makers
  - noise-making devices: radios, propane-fired scare cannons (in rural areas where by-laws permit)

### IF YOU ENCOUNTER A RED FOX

- Never approach or crowd the fox. Give it an escape route.
- If the fox approaches you, haze the animal to ensure it associates people with being a threat:
  - Maintain eye contact and stay facing the fox.
  - Let the fox know you are human. Stand tall, shout and wave your arms above your head to make yourself appear more threatening.
  - Make noise. You can use your voice, an air horn, a whistle, something that rattles, or anything that will make a loud noise.
  - Throw projectiles such as small rocks, cans, sticks or balls. Never throw food.
  - Spray the fox with a garden hose, use a squirt gun filled with water or diluted vinegar, or use a wildlife deterrent spray (often referred to as bear deterrent spray) if the animal comes within range.
  - Continue hazing the fox until it leaves the area.
- Hazing activities should only be done when a fox approaches a person or pet.
- Hazing activities should NOT be done when a fox:
  - doesn't have an escape route
  - is avoiding people and pets
- Report any encounter with an aggressive fox to a conservation officer.



If you use a bird feeder, clean up any spilled seed frequently. Red foxes prey on animals such as squirrels, mice and voles, all of which can be attracted to the birdseed.

## DISEASES AND PARASITES

### Rabies

- Rabies is a virus that attacks the central nervous system of mammals. The virus passes from an infected animal through its saliva, and will typically infect another animal by biting. Rabies is extremely rare in Manitoba's red foxes. However, in the Churchill area where the arctic fox rabies strain is more common, red foxes in the area have a greater chance of contracting rabies. Signs that a red fox may have rabies include:
  - partial paralysis
  - circling or staggering
  - self-mutilation
  - unprovoked aggression
  - acting unnaturally tame
- Any observation of these behaviours by a fox (or other mammal) should be reported a conservation officer and the local animal control agency immediately.

### Other Diseases

- Foxes carry numerous bacteria and parasites, which can be transmitted to humans. Many are transferred through feces, while others can be picked up by your pets and transferred to you. One emerging disease is a canid tapeworm, *Echinococcus multilocularis*.

Pet dogs can first pick up the tapeworm accidentally from coyote or fox feces, and then transmit it to people. This parasite can cause human illness and, in extremely rare cases, death.

- You can reduce risk of contracting fox-related diseases:
  - Wash your hands after handling wild animals, your pets, and especially their feces.
  - Never handle animal feces with bare hands. If you need to handle it, always use gloves.
  - Avoid contact with your pets in their anal and mouth regions.

## LETHAL REMOVAL

- Red foxes can be harvested by a licensed trapper during a regulated season. Trapping regulations apply.
- In certain circumstances, under The Wildlife Act, a person may kill a red fox to defend their property. They must report it to a conservation officer within 10 days. For additional information about this provision please contact Manitoba Government Inquiries at 204-945-3744, 1-866-MANITOBA or [mgi@gov.mb.ca](mailto:mgi@gov.mb.ca).
- Another option is to utilize the services of a pest management company that has been authorized to remove red foxes.

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**For more information on reducing the risk of conflicts with red foxes and other wildlife, visit [www.manitoba.ca/human-wildlife](http://www.manitoba.ca/human-wildlife).**

**To report wildlife showing aggressive behaviour, or that appears sick, injured, or orphaned, contact a conservation officer at the local district office or call the TIP line at 1-800-782-0076.**