

Coexisting with Foxes



Fox sightings are increasingly common across North Carolina, either because of the abundance of food available to foxes, or because they may have been disturbed from their resting place.

And, while the animal can be fascinating to watch, many people fear these foxes may have rabies. But seeing one, even during the day, does not necessarily mean the fox is diseased.

Here are a few simple steps to avoid conflict with this intriguing animal.

Fox Quick Facts

If I see a fox in the daytime, is it rabid?

No. It is now common to see foxes during the daytime and in urban or suburban areas. Foxes are responding to the lack of threats posed by people and the abundance of food available in suburban area. However, if the animal shows signs of rabies – such as aggression, stumbling or foaming at the mouth – call your local animal control.

What is the difference between a red and a grey fox?

The gray fox is slightly smaller than the red fox and is much darker in color. While gray foxes have a reddish hue on their neck and legs, their overall coloration is gray with a dark streak extending down the back and along the tail. The gray fox is the only fox native to North Carolina, and can climb trees, unlike the red fox.

The red fox was brought to North Carolina from Europe by hunters during colonial times. The tail, body and top of the head are all the same shade of red, while its undersides are light and its legs and ears are tipped in black. The tail is long, bushy, and has a white tip.

Both foxes live throughout the entire state.

Should I rescue/approach a den of pups?

Do not approach foxes or fox dens. Do not approach, touch or feed a fox or its pups.

Young animals, even if alone, are not necessarily abandoned. Many animals do not stay with their young and only return to feed them.

Will foxes attack me, my pet or my child?

Fox attacks on people, including children, are rare. While it is in a fox's nature to be curious, and even bold sometimes, they are not aggressive. But, like other wildlife, they will become habituated if people feed them, either purposely or inadvertently, such as with garbage or outdoor pet food.

What should I do if I see a fox?

Simply seeing a fox is not cause for concern and is in fact a very exciting opportunity for you to enjoy North Carolina's wildlife. However, if you see a fox frequently, you and your neighbors should take steps to prevent conflicts with it, and other wildlife, by implementing the following recommended steps.



National Park Service

Preventing Conflicts with Foxes

- **Don't try to approach or pet a fox.** Enjoy the sighting of a fox, and other wildlife, from a respectful distance.
- **Don't feed foxes or any wild animals,** or they will lose their fear of people. Feeding a fox rewards it for coming near people. Once a fox becomes habituated to people, it may become bold and aggressive.
- **Secure garbage in containers** with tight-fitting lids, and take them out in the morning of pick up, not the night before. Coyotes and other wildlife will scavenge trash.
- **Feed pets indoors or remove food** when your pet is finished eating outside. Foxes and other wildlife are attracted to pet food left outdoors.
- **Keep bird-feeder areas clean,** and use bird feeders that keep seed off the ground. Foxes are attracted to small animals congregating on the ground. If you frequently see foxes, remove all feeders.
- **Close off crawl spaces** under sheds, porches, decks and homes. Foxes may use these spaces to rest or to build their dens.
- **Secure pets** or keep them indoors. Dogs and cats can disturb dens, prompting aggressive fox behavior from the foxes.
- **Install fox-proof fencing** around your home, chicken coop or rabbit pen to protect unsupervised domestic pets.
- **Yell, bang pots and pans or set off legal fireworks** to scare foxes from your yard. This will also maintain their wariness of people.
- **Clear fallen fruit** from around trees.
- **Educate your neighbors.** Your efforts to prevent fox conflicts will be less effective if neighbors are still providing foods.



If you think you have a problem with a fox:

- **Implement the non-lethal steps** described above.
- **Call local animal control** if the fox exhibits signs of rabies, such as aggression, stumbling and foaming at the mouth.
- **It is illegal to relocate foxes** in North Carolina due to the potential to spread diseases and because this would simply move the problem, rather than solve it. The solution is to modify your habits and prevent foxes from being attracted to your home.
- **If the fox has caused property damage,** contact a Wildlife Damage Control Agent, a private individual who charges for his/her services. A list is available at www.ncwildlife.org under "Coexisting with Wildlife."
- **Foxes can be hunted** in some counties using firearms and archery equipment. However, check to see if local ordinances restrict the discharge of firearms and go to www.ncwildlife.org for hunting season dates and areas.
- **Foxes can be trapped** in some counties during the local fox trapping season. Go to www.ncwildlife.org to see if your county has a fox trapping season.



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