



MassWildlife

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

The Red Fox in Massachusetts

The **red fox** (*Vulpes vulpes*), is very adaptable to a wide range of habitats. Foxes can thrive close to humans and can flourish in suburban/urban areas. They require only a source of food, water and cover. To make your property less attractive and to avoid having problems with foxes, you should follow some basic steps:

✳ **Do not feed foxes!** Feeding alters the animal's behavior. In areas where foxes have had little contact with humans, they display cautious curiosity. Less fear is shown where contacts with humans are very common. They ultimately become dependent upon and less wary of humans. This can lead to potential problems (bites, scratches, encounters with pets)

✳ **Do remove any potential food source.** These would include eliminating all artificial food sources in your yard and your neighborhood. This means securing trash, garbage, compost and pet food. Suspend bird feeding operations as the seed attracts small mammals which in turn attract foxes and clean up dropped fruit from ornamental apple and other trees. In short, make sure any potential food source is unavailable to foxes.



✳ **Do eliminate shelter that could be attractive to foxes or their prey.** Construction debris, brush piles, wood piles, crawl spaces under shed or porches and brushy margins where your yard meets the woods are habitat for foxes and their prey such as small rodents, woodchucks, chipmunks and rabbits. Clean these areas up and make your yard as "park-like" as possible. Take the brush cutters and weed-whacker to the edges of your yard and cut back the understory to increase the buffer area between your space and the wooded areas. Make your yard unattractive habitat to foxes.

✳ **Do use negative reinforcement.** Don't hesitate to scare and threaten any fox you encounter in and around your yard. Loud noises, bright lights, thrown objects, etc. will negatively condition foxes to avoid your yard.

✳ **Do make these efforts universal around the neighborhood.** Your good efforts can be futile if a neighbor is throwing out table scraps to encourage the foxes to use backyards as a foraging area.

MassWildlife "Balancing the needs of wildlife with the needs of people."

MORE RED FOX INFORMATION

Distribution: The red fox is common and abundant in Massachusetts and can be found throughout the state, except Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The fox prefers a varied landscape. It thrives in areas where different habitats blend including forests, fields, orchards and brush lands. Foxes will most often use the transition areas between these habitat types.

General description: Red foxes are members of the dog family Canidae, and their general appearance is similar to domestic dogs and coyotes. The red fox measures 22 to 32 inches in head and body length, and the tail is 14 to 16 inches long. The adult fox weight is from 6 to 15 pounds, but it appears heavier than it actually is.

The red fox is usually recognized by its reddish coat and black "leg-stockings." Red is the most common color, but the hair may be from light yellow to deep auburn red. The white tip on the tail will distinguish this fox from other species, despite its color phase.

Life history: Red foxes breed mid January to late February. The den is a hole in the earth, 15 to 20 feet long, usually on the side of a knoll. It may have several entrances. Sometimes foxes dig their own dens. More often, though, they appropriate and enlarge the homesites of small burrowing animals, such as woodchucks. The young, called kits, are born after a gestation of 53 days. One litter is born each year. A litter of four kits is common. The young leave the den for the

first time a month later. The mother gradually weans them, and at 3 months old, the kits are learning to hunt. Foxes are quite vocal, having a large repertoire of howls, barks, and whines. The family unit endures until autumn, at which time it breaks up and each animal becomes independent

Habits: Red foxes are usually shy and wary but they are also curious. Activity is variable; they can be active night or day and sightings at dusk or dawn are common. They remain active all year and do not hibernate. Red foxes actively maintain territories. These areas may vary from 2 to 7 square miles.

Food: The red fox is omnivorous. They are opportunistic feeders and their primary foods include small rodents, squirrels, rabbits, birds, eggs, insects, vegetation, fruit and carrion. Foxes cache excess food when the hunting/foraging is good. They return to these storage sites and have been observed digging up a cache, inspecting it, and reburying it in the same spot.

Red foxes are an important natural resource in Massachusetts. They are classified as a furbearer species, for which an established regulated hunting season and management program exists. If you are experiencing problems with, or have questions regarding foxes, contact the nearest regional office of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CALL MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE AT: Pittsfield 413/447-9789, Belchertown 413/323-7632, West Boylston 508/835-3607, Acton 978/263-4347, Bourne 508/759-3406