



photos by Gerald and Buff Corsi (c) California Academy of Sciences

Foxes (Red and Gray)

Curious about the flash of red fur that you may see at dawn or dusk? It's likely that you caught a quick glimpse of a fox. Like wolves and coyotes, these members of the dog family are part of Fairfax County's wildlife.

Q: Aren't all foxes in Fairfax County the same?

A: No, we have two species of fox, red and gray, and they are only distantly related. Smaller than many other wild dogs, both weigh only 8-12 pounds and stand just 12-16 inches tall at the shoulders. Fairfax County's red foxes are generally larger and have a broader face than gray foxes. Red foxes are usually red, although they can be black or marbled, and have a solid red tail or a white tip to the tail. Gray foxes are mostly gray and have a black tip to their tail, which is quite luxuriant. Foxes eat a wide variety of fruits, insects, small rodents, reptiles, amphibians, the occasional bird and road kill.

Q: Where do foxes live?

A: Gray foxes prefer forest habitats and are mostly nocturnal (active at night). The more commonly seen red fox is often active during the day and lives in a variety of habitats, including field, forest and suburban neighborhoods.

Q: What goes on in a fox den?

A: Fox dens are used mostly for raising young. Dens can be a renovated woodchuck burrow, a hollow log or a small cave under rocks or tree trunks. Dens can be found almost anywhere, including on vacant lots, under sheds and in the stream valley parks. Foxes may bark at night in late winter and early spring when attracting mates and preparing to raise young. When not raising young, foxes are solitary and use any convenient cover for shelter.

Q: Can foxes harm humans?

A: Foxes can carry rabies, a deadly virus. If you observe a fox acting aggressively or oddly, do not approach it. Call Fairfax County's non-emergency response line at 703-691-2131 and ask to have an animal control officer dispatched. Foxes in urban areas commonly contract mange, a disease caused by mites that affects the skin and hair. Foxes with mange lose fur, have sores and frequently scratch and bite themselves. Fox mange can be contracted by dogs but generally is not a threat to other pets or humans. If foxes are encountered when and where they aren't wanted, don't run away. Stand your ground, wave your arms, yell and act threateningly – this should deter future visits.

Q: How can I help keep our foxes healthy?

A: High population densities of any wildlife can help spread disease or illness from one animal to the next. Eliminate food sources from around your house. For example, don't leave pet food unattended, and feed wild birds in feeders that are elevated and away from a house.

If not you, who? Small things.

◆ Many people are frightened by foxes and other wildlife. Be their advocate – gently encourage your neighbors and friends to tolerate these beneficial predators that eat small rodents like mice and rats.

If not you, who? Big things.

◆ Support efforts to preserve open space and improve natural areas by removing invasive non-native plants and by reducing deer browse so that foxes and other animals can have better natural habitat.

Foxes . . .

- ◆ act like cats when stalking and pouncing on their prey.
- ◆ Red foxes are found on every continent except South America and Antarctica.
- ◆ Gray foxes are the only member of the dog family that readily climbs trees.



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisors' 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship or call 703-324-8674



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