

FAIRFAX COUNTY WILDLIFE



MANGE IN FOXES

Mange is a naturally occurring, common skin disease caused by parasitic mites that affects many wild and domestic mammals. The most common type of mange affecting wildlife in our area is sarcoptic mange, caused by the *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite. Red foxes are the most commonly affected wildlife species in Fairfax County.

Mange is highly contagious and spread through direct physical contact with infected animals or prolonged contact with environments contaminated with mites, such as a den.

Mange causes intense itching and inflammation from an allergic reaction to the mite. Wildlife with mange often exhibit hair thinning and loss, thickening and wrinkling of the skin, scabs, skin lesions, and foul-smelling crusts from secondary skin infections from scratching to relieve itching.

Animals with mange may show little fear of humans and will often be seen out during the day laying in the sun in attempts to regulate body temperature following hair loss. Foxes suffering from mange are often mistaken as being rabid due to their sickly appearance and abnormal behavior.

Animals may recover from mange without intervention if low-level infections are present and they have a healthy immune system. Severely affected animals may become emaciated, dehydrated, and lethargic and ultimately succumb to the disease due to starvation and hypothermia.

It is illegal to administer medication to foxes without a permit from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VA Code § 29.1-508.1).

Treatment for mange in wildlife can only be done legally by a licensed veterinarian or permitted wildlife rehabilitator working under the direction of a veterinarian in a controlled setting with an approved permit.

Placement of medicated food in the wild to treat foxes is unsafe and illegal. Without proper veterinary diagnosis or way to ensure an animal receives the correct medication and dosage, it can be toxic to foxes, other wildlife, and domestic pets.

Fairfax County Animal Protection Police respond to reports of sick or injured animals. However, in many cases, foxes with mange are still agile enough to avoid capture and may not be located. The response for foxes is made on a case-by-case basis depending on the severity of infection and condition of the animal. Officers may coordinate with a permitted wildlife rehabilitator if the fox is able to be captured, humanely euthanize the fox to prevent further suffering, or not intervene.

If you have concerns about a fox exhibiting signs of illness, injury, or aggressive behavior towards humans, please contact the Fairfax County Animal Protection Police at 703-691-2131.

For a list of permitted wildlife rehabilitators, see: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators/>

*Fairfax County Animal Services Division
Animal Protection Police & Wildlife Section
4500 West Ox Road
Fairfax, VA 22030
Dispatch 703-691-2131*

*Virginia Wildlife Conflict Helpline
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
& USDA Wildlife Services
855-571-9003 (toll-free)*



Fairfax County
Police Department,
Animal Services
Division – Wildlife Section:
(703) 246-6868 TTY 711