



# Foxes: Control in Urban and Urban-Fringe Areas

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*The normal rural methods of fox control (such as shooting, poisoning and trapping) are usually not appropriate in urban and urban-fringe areas. This Landcare Note outlines fox activity in urban environments and describes actions that can be used to reduce their impact.*

Foxes were introduced into Australia in the 1870s as part of the European acclimatisation program. They spread rapidly as there was an abundance of susceptible prey and very little competition. Today foxes are found throughout Victoria and across two-thirds of Australia.

## Legal status

Foxes are declared as an Established Pest Animal in Victoria under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.

Predation of small animals by foxes is listed as a threatening process under the *Flora and fauna Guarantee Act (1988)* because of the threat it poses to native wildlife populations.

Further, the fox is considered to be the major vector for the spread of rabies should this disease enter Australia.

## Feeding

Foxes are opportunistic feeders and eat a wide variety of food. They prey on many native animals, including small mammals, birds and reptiles. They also feed on blackberry fruit and disperse the seed in their droppings. Foxes in urban areas regularly eat possums, mice and rats.

Foxes find residential areas an important location for food. They forage around rubbish bins, picnic sites and composts heaps. They also consume fruit and left-over pet food. Domestic fowl, livestock and guinea pigs not in robust enclosures may fall prey to foxes.

The practice of feeding native animals (especially possums and birds) can make them more susceptible as prey for both cats and foxes. Fed animals become less wary and therefore more vulnerable.

## Populations

Fox numbers in the urban and urban-fringe areas are higher than in country areas. Fox density ranges from 1 to

4 per square kilometre in country areas. In the urban-fringe areas, the average density is 6 to 8 foxes per square kilometre, with up to 14 per square kilometre in some urban environments.

However, 'visible' foxes do not necessarily indicate the true numbers present. Research suggests that for every fox seen there are another 4 undetected. This ratio may approach 10 in some areas.

## Activity

Foxes are generally nocturnal animals, resting during the day and foraging at night. They rest in many forms of shelter including: under houses; in sheds; in outbuildings; in hollow logs; under rock piles; in drain pipes; in car bodies; and under blackberry and gorse patches. Foxes often live in backyards or out-buildings without the knowledge of the landholder.

It is not unusual to see foxes in the urban area, especially between midnight and dawn. In warmer weather they may also be seen during the day.

Apart from the inner city and other highly developed areas, foxes occur in all areas of Melbourne. They frequently use backyards as regular routes to other food sources.

***Foxes are not considered a threat to children or to adult cats and dogs.***

## Breeding

Foxes produce one litter per year and reach sexual maturity within 10 months. Litter size ranges from 3 to 6 cubs. Dens are established in winter for breeding and cub rearing, with up to 3 dens being used at a time. The young appear in late spring and are independent by late summer.

## What to do

A fox removed from its territory will quickly be replaced with another. Hence it is advisable to concentrate on eliminating those things which are attractive to them (such as habitat and food) rather than trying to remove them.

- If a breeding den is identified early in the breeding season, contact your Shire or Council ranger. Many council staff are trained in the use of humane methods



of den fumigation developed for urban areas. Authorised pest controllers may also carry out den fumigation.

- Lock up chickens, ducks, guinea pigs and pet rabbits in a roofed and robust enclosure at night.
- Clean up food scraps, pet food left outside and excess fruit dropped by fruit trees.
- Cover your compost heap or use a compost bin.
- Never make foxes pets by feeding them.
- Remove blackberry and other weed thickets that provide cover for foxes.
- Do not feed wildlife.
- If you see a fox in the area let your neighbours know so they can take action.
- Shooting is only an option if:
  - the property is in a predominately rural area;
  - the property size is greater than 2ha
  - the advice of the local police is sought
- Poisoning is usually not an option in urban and urban-fringe areas.
- Cage traps can be used, although success rates are not high. Steel jaw leg hold traps and neck snare traps must not be used.

## Acknowledgements

This Landcare Note was originally created by Paul Hay, June 2003 and based on two original documents produced by Ray Jasper, Fay Valcanis, Tim Bloomfield, Ken Ward, Kerry Regan and Mike Howes. Updated by Michael Rosier, DPI, December 2007.

## Further information

- Contact your local landcare or friends group for further assistance and advice.
- Call the DPI/DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.
- Contact your local DPI Pest Management Officer for advice on local programs.
- Visit the DPI website at:  
<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au>  
and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre at: <http://www.invasiveanimals.com>

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