

Fox

Vulpes vulpes (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Carnivora

The fox is the size of a small dog – up to 75cm long with a tail (or brush) adding another 45cm. The male, or dog, weighs up to about 7Kg and the females, or vixens, are slightly smaller. The fur is reddish brown and there is a white underside, throat and muzzle. The lower limbs and ears are black. Cubs are dark chocolate brown for the first month of life.

Foxes often leave their droppings, or scats, at prominent places in their territory. The scats are 5-20cm long and spirally twisted, they have a strong musty smell and may contain fur, insect remains, bones or seeds depending on the animal's recent diet. Foxes also use urine to scent mark their territory. Fox prints resemble a small dog but they are narrower with the two front pads much closer together.

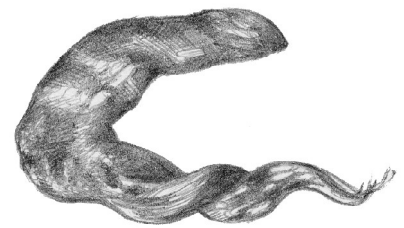
Dens or earths are often excavated in old rabbit or badger burrows and consist of a tunnel of several metres which ends in a sleeping chamber. The den often smells strongly musty and there may be prey remains around the entrance. In urban areas foxes may set up home in old buildings or under garden sheds. Outside the breeding season many animals lie up above ground in dense cover



Photograph: Dave Chapman



Fox paw print (5x3cm)



Fox Scat

Foxes generally live in small family groups of one dog fox with several related vixens and their cubs. The fox is generally nocturnal and will spend the day in the den. Foxes mate in December and January and the litter of cubs are born between March and May. The number of cubs depends on the food available and up to 10 may be born in each litter, although 4 or 5 is more usual. At higher population levels only the dominant vixen will breed. The cubs are born blind and deaf and are weaned after 8-10 weeks. The cubs are sexually mature by their first winter. Few foxes survive their first year and 5 is a good age for a fox, although they have lived to 14 years in captivity.

Foxes occur in almost all habitats, from open moorland, through woodland and agricultural areas to residential gardens and industrial sites. Some, but not all foxes defend territories, the size of which varies with the available food resources. In open moorland the territory may be up to 4000 Ha, while in residential gardens it may be as small as 10 Ha.

Foxes are opportunistic hunters and scavengers and their diet varies with their habitat. In rural areas the diet consists mainly of earthworms, fruit, and small mammals, in urban areas scavenging from bird tables and dustbins makes up over 30% of the diet. In open country birds and their eggs are more important. Generally less than 10% of a fox's diet consists of domestic stock and foxes have been estimated to take no more than 0.5% of farmer's lambs and even these were generally dead or dying before the fox arrived.

Adult foxes have no natural predators in the UK but cubs may be killed by badgers. Most foxes die from human impacts – hunting and traffic as well as poisoning and dog attacks. In some areas sarcoptic mange and other diseases may kill large numbers of foxes.

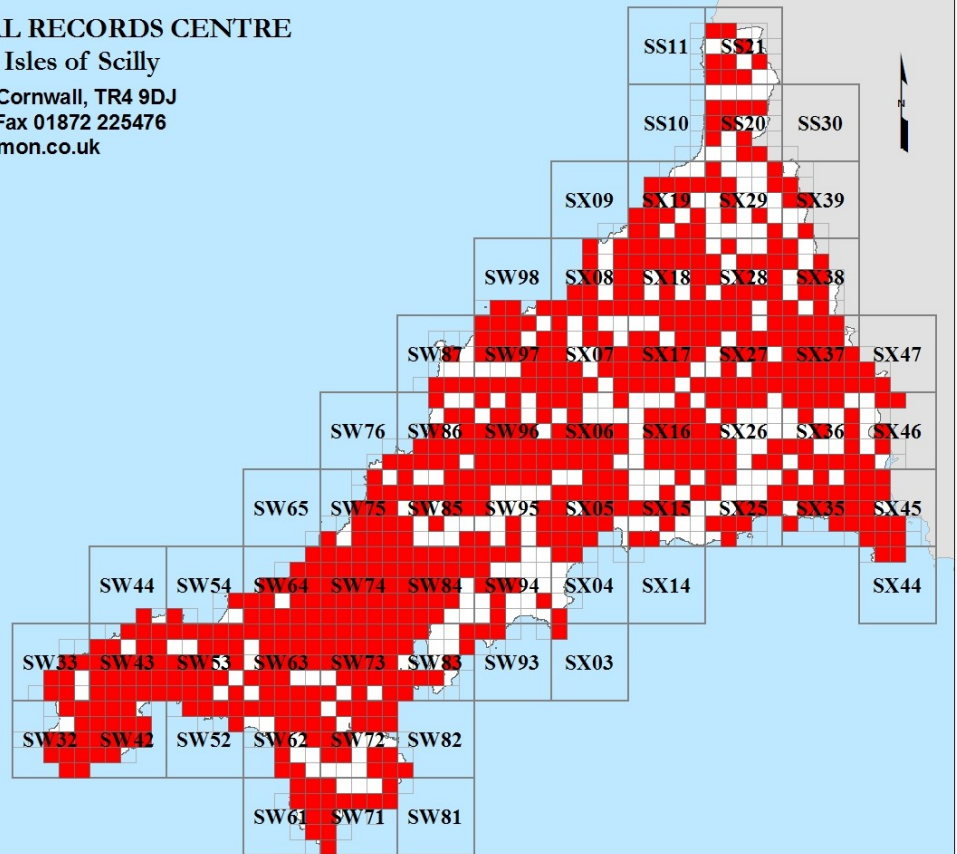


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Cornwall Mammal Group
Fox
Vulpes vulpes
As of September 2009

Legend

- Grid 10 Km
- Grid 2 Km (Tetrad)
- Fox records, 2000-2009



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Local distribution and key sites

The fox is widespread and common throughout Cornwall. The apparent concentration of records in the west of the county may be due to recorder effort.

Number of records per date class

2002 to 2006 inclusive 1698

1997 to 2001 inclusive 334

All records previous to 1997 779

Total 2811

The red fox occurs naturally across Europe, north west Africa and Asia, into central India. The red fox has been introduced for hunting to America and Australia, where it poses a serious threat to indigenous species.

Foxes are common and widely distributed across the UK. They are not of conservation concern and have no specific protection.

Survey Methods

Field surveys for tracks and signs
Traffic casualty monitoring
Hunting returns

Did you know?

Foxes make more than 40 distinct calls – both males and females make the eerie scream that is often heard during the breeding season. Bird kill remains left by foxes have their large feathers bitten off close to the skin, whereas raptors pluck the feathers.

Key references

Harris, S. & White, P. (1994) The red fox. The Mammal Society, London

Macdonald, D. (1987) Running with the fox. Unwin Hyman, London.

Kitchener, A.C. and Yalden, D.W. (2008) in Harris, S. and Yalden, D.W. (Eds.) Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook, 4th Ed. The Mammal Society.

www.thefoxwebsite.org