

The fox (3)

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Red foxes are the most common canines found in the wild. They can exist quite happily in both urban and rural areas, with about 33 000 living in towns and cities in Britain. The scientific name for a fox is *Vulpes vulpes*.

They have long slender faces, with pointed ears. Their coats are reddish brown with a white throat and belly. Usually weighing about 4 to 8 kg, they are about 65 cm long with a white tipped bushy tail adding another 40 cm. They have excellent vision and sense of smell and even have 28 different calls to each other.



Foxes live in a den called an earth and the females give birth to 4 or 5 cubs, usually in March. If you have a fox's earth in your garden you may be lucky enough to see the cubs playing outside in April or May. They are blind and deaf at birth, relying on their mother's milk for the first few weeks of their lives. After about six weeks they start eating earthworms, beetles and insects. There are many sources of food for foxes in towns, including worms, crane flies, beetles, berries and windfall apples. Adult foxes are carnivores (meat eaters) and will eat rabbits, rodents and birds' eggs as well as unprotected pets such as guinea pigs. They are especially fond of blackberries and can be seen eating ripe blackberries during the season.

Each adult male fox has a territory for its family and other foxes will keep out of this area. This territory is marked by the fox's scent. They are nervous animals and generally try to avoid humans, being most active at dawn and dusk. However, they can be very curious and often enter gardens, even during the day, to look for food. They are solitary animals and unlike some other dogs do not hunt in packs. In towns at night they often meet cats but the two creatures seem to ignore each other. If a fox is seen eating the flesh of a dead cat it is probable that the cat was killed by another means, such as being run over.



Captive foxes may live up to 14 years but most wild foxes only live for two to three years, with over half of all foxes not living for more than one year. A common disease that foxes suffer from is called mange.

Whilst foxes have been voted the second most popular animal in Britain they also have lots of enemies. Many people consider them a nuisance and many are killed by humans or by cars at night. Old sayings about foxes describe them as sly and cunning.

Name:



Questions:

1. What is the Latin name for a fox?

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2. To what group of animals do foxes belong?

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3. Describe a fox in detail.

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4. How old are the cubs when they start to eat solid food?

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5. Name some of the foods that are part of the fox's carnivorous diet.

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6. How long do wild foxes live?

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7. Why do you think that foxes in captivity live longer than wild foxes?.....

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8. Use a dictionary to help find the meanings of the following words as used in the passage:

rural:

carnivore:

9. Find out more about mange and how it can be treated.

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Name:

Answers

1. The Latin name for a fox is *Vulpes vulpes*.
2. Foxes are canines.
3. A detailed description of a fox.
4. The cubs are about six weeks old when they start to eat solid food.
5. The foods that are part of the fox's carnivorous diet include earthworms, beetles, rabbits, rodents and unprotected pets such as guinea pigs.
6. Wild foxes live between one and two years.
7. Any sensible reason given. e.g. foxes are often killed on the road at night; foxes in captivity have a plentiful food supply.
8. rural: countryside
carnivore: an animal that eats flesh
9. Further information about mange: a skin disease caused by parasitic mites.