

# Fox

Explore lots of information on foxes for children! Learn about a fox's habitat, what they eat, and much more.

## What is a fox?



Foxes are small to medium-sized [mammals](#) with a typically orange-brown coat and a bushy tail. They have upright triangular ears that are similar to a cat's and dark, slightly upturned noses.

They walk on their toes and have partially retractable claws. They have black whiskers on their face and legs to help them find their way through tall grass. They also use their big bushy tails to communicate messages with other foxes and to wrap up warm when they're sleeping!

They're small enough to effectively move, hunt and hide in the under brush and other small spaces, but large enough to prey on animals smaller than them.

Foxes are primarily [nocturnal animals](#), which means they are active during the night, but they are often seen during the day too.

Male foxes are known as dogs, tods or reynards and female foxes are called vixens.

## Different species of foxes

There are 12 types of 'true foxes' and 47 subspecies of foxes! In the UK, the most common species of fox is the red fox that has orange and white fur and a bushy tail.

Here are some other examples of foxes from around the world and how they've adapted to their habitat:

### **Fennec**

This species lives in the Sahara desert and is known for its unusually large ears. These help to keep the fox cool in the harsh temperatures of its habitat.

### **Arctic**

Also known as the white, polar or snow fox, the Arctic fox lives in the Arctic tundra and has pure white fur that is thick, warm and camouflages the fox against its environment.

### **Grey**

Named for its colour, the Grey fox lives throughout North and Central America. They are smaller than Red foxes and have a black-tipped tail.

### **Bat-eared**

This fox lives on the African savanna and is named after its large ears that it uses to regulate its body heat. According to fossil records, it first appeared 800,000 years ago!

### **Kit**

The Kit species lives in the Southwestern United States as well as northern and central Mexico. It lives in arid regions such as the desert and grasslands.

## **What do foxes eat?**

Foxes are an **omnivorous** species with a varied diet. They are **predators** that have evolved to be excellent hunters and they often hunt small animals and insects as their prey, including:

- rabbits;
- rodents;
- birds;
- worms;
- frogs;
- and rats.

They also eat berries and fruits and will scavenge for leftover food in dustbins in urban areas.

Fox cubs will start eating this type of food when they are around 12 weeks old. Before this, they are dependent on their mother's milk, just like other mammals such as cats and dogs.

### What is a fox's habitat?

Foxes have adapted to live in lots of different diverse habitats around the world. A fox's habitat is usually a forest [habitat](#), but they can also live in:

- mountainous areas;
- grasslands;
- [woodlands](#);
- farmland;
- wetland;
- and deserts.

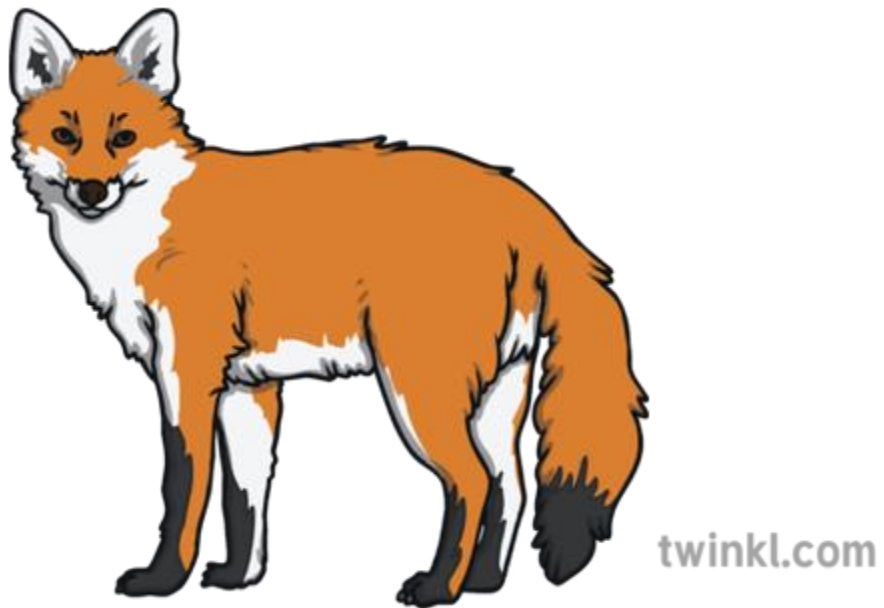
Foxes also adapt well to human environments, such as farms and suburban and urban areas, thanks to their resourcefulness. Because of this, they're seen as intelligent and cunning.



## Where are foxes most commonly found?

They can be found over almost all of Europe, temperate Asia, northern Africa and North America. Foxes have also been introduced to Australia, where they've established themselves across most of the continent.

Red foxes are the most widely distributed true fox, and they inhabit the entire Northern Hemisphere, including North America, Europe, Asia, as well as parts of North Africa. They can even be found living in the Arctic tundra, alongside the Arctic fox.



## Where do foxes live in the UK?

In the UK, foxes also make their homes in urban areas and cities. Foxes were first recorded living in southern urban areas of Britain in the 1930s. Urban expansion during this time period meant that there was an abundance of food and an ideal new habitat that attracted foxes.

No matter where they live, foxes will dig burrows in the ground called dens or earths. This gives them a cool area to sleep, somewhere to store their food and a safe place to have their offspring which can be called pups, kits or cubs.

In urban areas, foxes build their dens under sheds, among trees roots, along railway embankments or simply in bushes. Foxes will stay in their dens for longer periods of time during the winter months, but you might be lucky enough to spot them in the open when it's warm during the summer!

In these habitats, foxes live in social groups of two to six adults, but they search for food on their own. They use their bushy tails and barks, whines and other noises to communicate with each other!



## A fox lives in a den.



Photo courtesy of Jim McCreel (@JimMcCreel) - granted under creative commons license - attribution

### How has the red fox adapted to its habitat?

The red fox's habitat is all over the world — so how has it adapted to so many environments and climates?

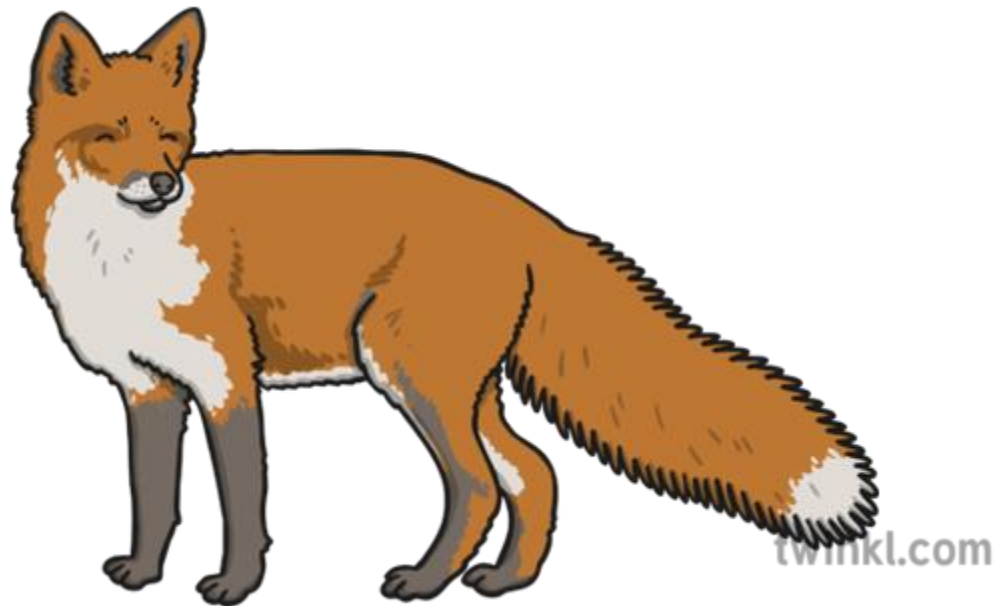
While many species can only adapt to their native territories, red foxes can adapt to just about any habitat or territory they come across.

They can adapt their behaviour, physical traits, hunting and eating habits, and they can think on their feet. This all helps them to thrive in just about any environment.

Since they're omnivores (eating both animals and plants), they don't have to worry too much about the kinds of food sources they'll find in a particular habitat.

They also have long legs and slim bodies which help them to run fast (up to 30 mph!) so they can outrun potential predators and hunt prey.

Their red and brown fur can camouflage them in a range of natural environments, from woods in the UK to dense forests in Europe or North America.



Red foxes have also managed to adapt to colder habitats and climates thanks to thermoregulation. They're covered in thick fur from their heads to their toes which keeps them warm, even in the freezing temperatures of the Arctic. The fur also gives their feet insulation for when they walk on the snow. They can survive in such cold temperatures, that they often cross paths with Arctic foxes in the Tundra!

Foxes also have a unique hunting style they can use in the snow so that they don't just have to rely on their smell and hearing. Often, they don't even need to hunt in the first place — they're skilled foragers and scavengers, and they can find leftover prey that other animals have left behind, or fruits such as berries.

## Foxes in folklore

Foxes have often been a significant feature in [folktales and myths](#). They can symbolise lots of different things, including:

- mischief;
- opportunity;
- playfulness;
- cleverness;
- and curiosity.

Most commonly, they represent cunning or trickery.

In Japanese folklore, foxes are known as *Kitsune* that can transform into humans and trick people! They're also seen as powerful, intelligent and full of wisdom.

## Fun facts about foxes

- Pregnant vixens make a nest of leaves inside her burrow to have her pups. The nest is inside a special room called a nesting chamber.
- Foxes are more closely related to dogs than to cats, despite their feline appearance.
- Foxes can identify each other's voices, which might be why they can be so vocal. In fact, they use 28 different types of calls to communicate with each other.
- They have excellent hearing and can even hear rodents digging underground.
- They can use their bushy tails as a blanket in cold weather.
- A group of foxes is called a skulk or leash.
- Their whiskers help them to navigate, similar to cat.
- Foxes are the only type of dog that can retract their claws.
- A red fox's forepaws have five toes, whereas their hind ones only have four.