

### OPINION

## Spare our wily neighbour

adapted from an article by **Stephen Harris**, ecologist

- 1 IN THE UK, whenever wildlife is seen to be posing a problem, it goes without saying that the culprits are branded as too abundant – be they badgers, grey squirrels or foxes. I cannot remember how often I have been told that the number of foxes needs to be actively brought down as they lack natural predators. So it was almost inevitable that when a baby in Bromley, in the suburbs of south-east London, was bitten by a fox that got into a house this month, Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, demanded that the city's many borough councils tackle the



- "growing problem" of urban foxes, which he called a "pest and a menace".
- 2 Fortunately, cases of foxes biting children are very rare, but whenever they happen the media is whipped into a frenzy and such language dominates the coverage. Feeding this frenzy may be good for a paper's circulation and a politician's image, but it sidesteps the facts. When the house-building boom and suburban expansion in the 1930s created an ideal habitat of lower-density housing with bigger gardens, foxes started colonising our cities. From the late 1940s, the then Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries started trapping and shooting foxes in south-east London. However, their efforts had no discernable impact and most London boroughs ceased their control measures in the 1980s.
- 3 The lack of success was hardly surprising. Studies in Scotland and Wales both suggest that culling leads to a slightly bigger breeding population the next year, probably because more foxes move in to contest the vacant area than were there in the first place. 19, culling won't target individual foxes that have become used to people and pose a genuine risk.
- 4 With all the misinformation around, it may be surprising to hear that we know more about urban foxes in the UK than rural ones – far more. There is also far more published data on urban foxes in the UK than on foxes anywhere in the world. This makes misleading media coverage even more puzzling and worrying. But the British press feeds on hype, not science.

5 That isn't to say there is not a growing problem: there is. More and more television programmes show people handling wildlife; macho presenters have to touch, catch or wrestle animals. When people follow their example, such as by encouraging foxes to come into their kitchen to be fed, perhaps even eating out of their hands, 21. Ultimately, it is human rather than fox behaviour that is the issue.

6 Urban wildlife confrontations are also on the rise in the US, where coyote attacks are more common. Being larger than foxes, coyotes cause nastier injuries. But the problem is recognised as being 95 per cent due to human behaviour, and the focus is on educating people, not shooting coyotes. In Australia, where dingo attacks are an issue, the focus has also been on changing people's behaviour. In the UK the response is far less 22: the media publicises people showing off 'tame' foxes and then goes into a frenzy over the predictable problems such misguided behaviour brings. So for 24 hours after the Bromley baby was bitten, my phone never stopped ringing. Then it suddenly fell silent. An 85-year-old man in Rome<sup>1)</sup> announced his retirement and the media circus moved on.

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noot 1 Pope Benedict XVI

## Tekst 6 Spare our wily neighbour

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- 1p 16 What is the main point made in paragraph 1?
- A Cities have become attractive habitats for wild animals.
  - B It is necessary to get rid of wild animals in urban areas.
  - C People are quick to think there are too many wild animals about.
  - D Stories about wild animals acting aggressively are rather popular.
- “urban foxes” (einde alinea 1)
- 1p 17 In welke zin later in de tekst wordt uitgelegd waarom er zoveel vossen zijn in de stad?  
Citeer de eerste twee woorden van deze zin.
- 1p 18 What becomes clear in paragraph 2?
- A In the past, foxes were not considered to be dangerous at all.
  - B Media reports have hindered the extermination of urban foxes.
  - C On the whole, killing off foxes has proven to be ineffective.
  - D The destruction of foxes should not be left to the government.
- 1p 19 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 3?
- A As a result
  - B In addition
  - C On the other hand
- 1p 20 What is the function of paragraph 4?
- A It adds to and repeats information given in previous paragraphs.
  - B It illustrates and explains information given in previous paragraphs.
  - C It questions and undermines information given in previous paragraphs.
- 1p 21 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 5?
- A conflicts are inevitable
  - B foxes are poisoned
  - C journalists are interested
  - D solutions are possible

- 1p 22 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 6?  
A controversial  
B drastic  
C irresponsible  
D rational
- 1p 23 “An 85-year-old man in Rome announced his retirement” (last sentence)  
Why does the writer mention this event?  
A to explain why so many people consulted him on the fox attack  
B to illustrate that the media’s interest in a story is often short-lived  
C to put his critical comments on the media in a historical perspective  
D to stress that there are more important issues to be reported on
- 1p 24 Welke zin uit de tekst vat samen wat volgens Stephen Harris de oorzaak is van de problemen met vossen in Groot-Brittannië?  
Citeer de eerste twee woorden van deze zin.

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**Bronvermelding**

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