

Foxes split S.C. community

By BO PETERSEN
The (Charleston) Post and Courier

The fox kits peer out from a cage in the yard with dour eyes. The trapper drops in a can of chicken in water. Across Riverland Drive, Meridith Barnola watches, her hand-scrawled "Save the Foxes" sign by her side.

The two kits are bait to trap the mother fox. Two more kits were still loose on Friday afternoon, thought to be in the den in a drainage culvert alongside the road, where another trap cage is set in this Charleston area community. Along the marsh properties in tree-lined Riverland Terrace on James Island, there's a tussle going on — residents are either for the foxes or for the squirrels.

These foxes are very likely about to lose, all to the persistent hooting of squirrel-eating owls. The foxes are caught in a clash of values; leave them put or put them out.

It's a neighborhood feud that flares up more and more as the wildlife-rich Lowcountry develops and critters like fox, alligators or deer get a little too used to urban life. It happens especially in the spring, when species are out in the open, on



By GRACE BEAHM *The (Charleston) Post and Courier*
One of two kit fox peers out of a cage it is caught in on James Island.

the move, mating or hunting for food for their young.

In Riverland Terrace, the fox-trapping raised enough hackles that a crowd formed when the traps were set and police were called. A neighbor nearby shooed a reporter from the front door, waving a hand and saying, "I don't want to get into that."

"She comes out at night and runs along the edge of the marsh," Barnola said about the mother fox she likes to watch from her window in the sunset. "She's cute, inquisitive. She pounces on mice with both front legs."

Bette and Paul Hund called in a trapper to remove the fox-

es from the culvert in front of their home after becoming unsettled by dead animals they found in their yard, they said.

"They are a nuisance. What we are doing is perfectly legal. Her sign says 'save the foxes.' That's what we're doing. We're going to save them," Paul Hund said.

Unfortunately, they're not likely to. Robert Vanwormer, of Southern Trappers, said he would rather relocate animals or send orphan young to rehabilitation centers to be weaned to the wild, where they're better off than dodging suburban traffic.

"I don't like killing babies. You give them a good place

where there's water nearby and ample food supply, you increase their chance of survival," he said. But he can't with the foxes. State law says that once a fur-bearing animal is trapped it must be killed. There's too big a danger of rabies or another disease getting relocated along with the animal.

"If they don't euthanize them, they're breaking the law," said Sam Chappelle, regional wildlife coordinator.

"I don't want to kill these things, but I'm being forced legally to do what I don't want to do. I want to save my business," Vanwormer said.

Across the street, Barnola is gathering names on a petition. She has 25 when another Riverland Terrace resident rolls up in a car, tells her about having to trap foxes over near her place, then signs.

"I know they have a legal right to trap them. But if they trap them, they have to be euthanized," Barnola said. Because the trapper smoked out the culvert and blasted air horns to scare them into the trap, she said, "If they would just lift them out of the cage and keep this culvert blocked up, they wouldn't see them again."