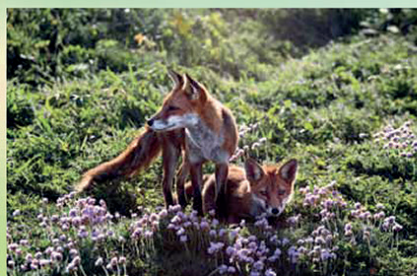




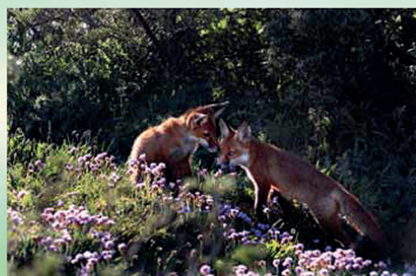
*Keeping an eye on the seagulls on his first day out*



*Daughter deciding to stay close to mum for the time being*



*Hanging around with mum*



*and sis*

This year two males and one female were born to the head of the family on the clifftop. When they are first born cubs are deaf and blind, and completely dependent on their mother for food and warmth. They weigh about a hundred grammes, are about ten centimetres in length and have short dark fur and a pink nose. When their eyes open they are initially blue, but change to amber between four and five weeks, and the colour of their fur begins to turn red at three weeks.

They begin to experiment with solid food at the age of three to four weeks, are weaned by about eight weeks and far more independent by three months when they become much more aware of any potential danger. Mum doesn't allow them out onto the clifftop until they are a few weeks old.





*I won't do it again - honest!*

They love games - are very skilful at jumping and running around incredibly fast, but the game they seem to enjoy most (when they are cubs) is sneaking up behind an unsuspecting adult before leaping on top of them. The adult would always know they were there but most times wouldn't let on so as not to spoil the game.

They are extremely sensitive to the slightest movement. They have highly receptive, and very mobile ears, which can be moved independently allowing them to pinpoint a specific sound at some distance away. It is as though they can 'see' with their ears. I've been with them and, many times, noticed a change in their behaviour, and about 30 seconds later someone would appear some way away.



*Just checking!*



*A game of leapfox*



*Nothing to worry about - those teeth look fine to me*





*The other half of the family (the niece's cubs) live high up on the nearby hill*



*You looking at me?!*



*Fancy a game?*

As I mentioned at the start, the niece's cubs live high up on the nearby hill. They are cousins of the three on the clifftop, and one male became a special friend (this is the cub whose cousin follows me up from the clifftop). Because of fox protocol (his cousin is son of the Top Fox) he will be submissive, but whe he thinks his cousin is getting a little too close forcomfort, he would hiss a brief warning. There would often be a slightly uneasy peace between them as they sat either side of me.

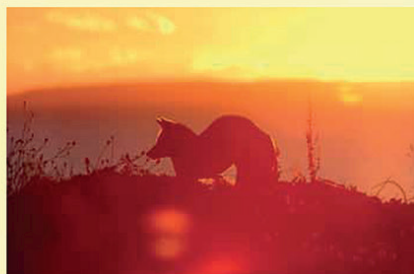
Later in the year when foxes are considering moving out to new territory there would sometimes be scuffles. Occasionally it would all go off at my feet, but thankfully it didn't last long before they would either agree to disagree and settle down again, or the cub from the clifftop would chase his cousin off.

Better that, than me attempting to referee a serious fox fight!





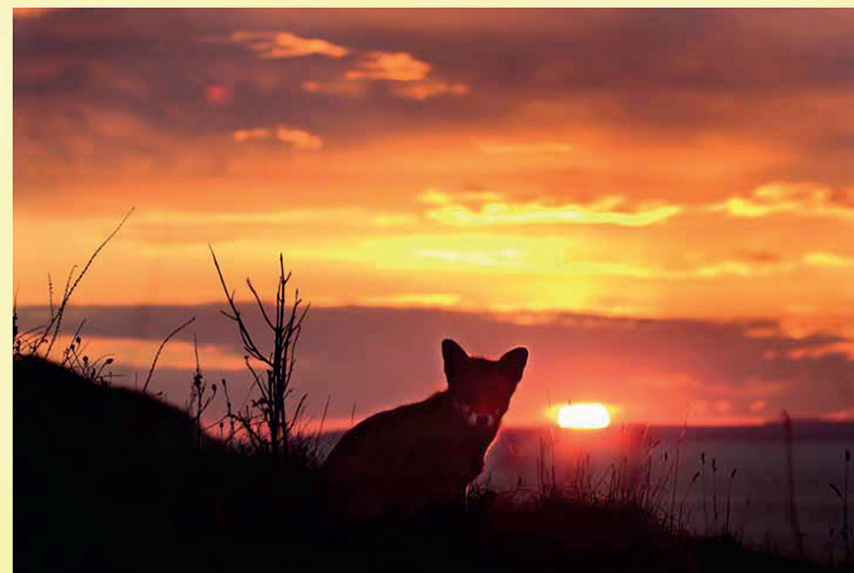
*October sunsets at the edge of the cliff*



*Sheltering from November rain*



*Mother and son looking deep inside*



*Mum in the setting sun*

As time passes we get to know each other on a different level because there is a trust that allows me to get close enough to look straight into their eyes, and when they look back it's as though they are staring deep into your soul. There's an understanding, a bond, and at the moment your eyes lock, it's as though you can say that you are really part of their lives.

We are fortunate to inhabit a beautiful planet where the natural world regulates itself, and we need to learn to live in harmony with it rather than selfishly trying to dominate it.

Please take great care of this world we live in - it's the only one we've got.