

Uninvited GUESTS

Prevent and Control Nuisance Wildlife Encounters

More than 75 percent of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. While the growth of cities and subdivisions displaces some wildlife, many species actually benefit from urban growth and thrive in the habitat available in parks, undeveloped parcels of land and vacant lots, along stream and river corridors and in our backyard landscapes. Their presence can provide recreational and educational viewing opportunities. For many people, especially children, viewing wildlife in the backyard is exciting. People and wildlife can peacefully coexist in most situations. However, there may be times when conflicts arise.

Sometimes the proximity of wildlife to people's homes can cause problems. The simplest and most effective solutions involve preventing wildlife problems before they happen, instead of coping with a wild animal who has become a trouble-causing resident. Most of the common problems associated with urban wildlife (for example, squirrels in the attic, skunks under the deck, or raccoons rooting through the garbage) can be avoided by implementing a few simple and inexpensive measures.

-Excerpted from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife, www.odnr.com



Prevention

- Do NOT feed wildlife. If you choose to feed songbirds, place a feeder with a gravity-operated treadle that is inaccessible to other wildlife species. Be careful not to let spilled food accumulate.
- Keep pet food inside rather than outdoors where it is accessible to wildlife.
- Keep edible garbage where wildlife cannot get to it.
- Be certain to secure garbage containers and eliminate odors. A small amount of ammonia or cayenne pepper in the garbage discourages scavenging.
- Start a non-toxic insect control program (especially for grubs) to discourage digging.
- Trim tree branches that overhang the house or that are lower than 3' and remove unused TV towers.
- Screen bathroom, stove and other vents and attic openings with heavy rust proof 1"x1" wire mesh. Fix any holes or openings that allow access to attics or basements.
- Sprinkle epsom salts on fruits and vegetables in your garden to deter wildlife. Re-apply after any rain.
- Install fences around gardens that are 3'-4' high. Bury a 1' section underground at a 90 degree angle with the bottom of the fence pointing away from the garden.

Raccoons

Raccoons are about the size of a small dog, and are most notable for their black mask and bushy ringed tail. The ears are small and the feet and forepaws are dexterous. An average litter of raccoons is 4-5, born from April—May of each year. The mother at first carries them by the nape of the neck like a cat; they are weaned by late summer. The raccoon is intelligent, possesses manual dexterity and has a nocturnal lifestyle, which makes them well suited to living near people. These animals are omnivorous, meaning they consume both animal and plant matter. Their diet varies with locality, season and availability. Often raccoons will eat grapes, nuts, grubs, crickets, small mammals, birds' eggs and nestlings. They are also known for raiding gardens, garbage cans, bird feeders, fish ponds and even kitchen cabinets. Often seen washing their food, the raccoon is actually feeling for matter that should be rejected as the wetting of the paws enhances its sense of feel. The raccoon inhabits hollow trees and logs for homes and often uses the ground burrows of other animals for raising their young or for sleeping during the coldest part of the winter months. Problem raccoons are usually the result of chronic feeding by humans. Once raccoons take up residence in an attic or outbuilding they can become very destructive and difficult to remove. Prevention is the key to dealing with raccoon problems.



Opossums

The opossum is a cat size mammal that resembles a silver rat, with its naked ears, long scaly tail, and silver-tipped fur. The face of the opossum is almost pure white, with four rows of whiskers, a pink nose, and eyes like black shoe buttons. The average adult is 24 to 26 inches long, including the tail, and usually weighs between 6 and 12 pounds. The opossum is a passive animal, but it looks dangerous when it displays all 50 teeth, drools and hisses. If threatened they may go limp and appear dead, hence “playing possum.” Opossums are solitary animals, except when females are with their young, or for brief interludes during breeding season (end of winter). Only male opossums are territorial, and they will fight violently during mating season. The age of maturity for males is 8 months, and for females 6 months. Gestation is only 12-13 days and 6-20 babies are born (average litter is 7). Opossums may have two litters in one year. Opossums are nocturnal animals, but they are often seen during the day when their natural habitat has been destroyed, when they are searching for food, or when young and not yet street wise. Opossums are attracted to virtually any type of available food, including garbage, pet food, or cultivated fruits and vegetables.

Skunks

Skunks are born from late April to early May. Their litters vary in size from 1-7 (average litter is 5). Skunks are hardly ever found more than two miles from a water source. In urban settings, skunks den beneath buildings, decks, dumps, and woodpiles. They are capable of burrowing a den a foot or so underground, with well-hidden entrances. They like warm, dry, dark, and defensible areas; most house basements and crawl spaces qualify. Skunks are generally nocturnal and begin foraging at sunset. Skunks eat both vegetables and meat. They often travel 5-10 miles within their territory at night looking for field mice and other small rodents as well as birds, eggs, garbage, acorns and fallen fruit. They also dig for insects, especially beetles, larvae, and earthworms. Since skunks will eat just about anything, they help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean. An estimated 70% of a skunk's diet consists of insects considered harmful to humans. If approached by an intruder and unable to flee, a skunk will usually fluff its fur, shake its tail, stamp the ground with its front feet, growl, stand on its hind legs, turn its head and spit to scare the potential attacker. If those techniques do not work, it will lift up its tail and spray. The chemical skunks spray at their enemies is a sulfur compound called N-bulymercaptan. The glands that produce the chemical hold enough for five or six full-powered sprays. Although they have sharp teeth, they rarely use them in defense, because their spray is most accurate and effective at a range of up to 15 feet. Having adapted well to neighborhoods, it's not uncommon to find skunks and domestic cats dining peacefully together. There have been cases of skunks entering homes through pet doors, dining with the family cat and finding a quiet closet or empty bed to spend the night. As long as the skunk does not feel threatened, it won't spray. Skunks are very adaptable and often find food and nesting sites around human habitations. The best protection against them is to modify your habitat to limit resources available to them.



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Frank G. Jackson

Other uninvited guests may include squirrels, groundhogs, snakes, bats and roosting birds such as sparrows, starlings and pigeons.

For information about these animals or to learn more about preventing nuisance wildlife encounters, please visit www.odnr.com.