

Coexisting with Wildlife Fact Sheets

Fund Facts: Coexisting with Wildlife Fact Sheet #1

Bats in Your Belfry? Humane Ways to Solve Wildlife Problems

Wild animals often nest or roam near human dwellings, especially during the spring or summer when they seek out cavities to begin nursing and raising their young. Here is some practical advice on how to resolve common wildlife problems using humane and inexpensive methods.

BATS

Q: What should I do if there's a bat in my house or there are bats roosting in my attic?

A: Don't panic. Bats have been plagued by centuries of superstitions, but they are actually one of nature's more gentle creatures. If you are positive that the bat has not bitten anyone or been in anyone's bedroom overnight, confine the animal to one room and open a window or exterior door. The flying bat will locate the opening by echolocation. All you need to do is turn out the lights, stand in a corner, and you should see the bat fly out. If the bat is not flying, check draperies or other places where the bat can hang easily. Wear heavy gloves and capture the bat either by placing a shoebox over the bat and then gently sliding a piece of cardboard underneath, or by carefully putting a towel over the bat and carrying the bat outside for release (put the bat on a wall or tree limb; they cannot fly up from the ground). Avoid direct contact with the bat so you don't get bitten. If the bat has bitten someone, contact your local health department for instructions and contain the bat for rabies testing, if possible.

Bats enter buildings through holes under roof overhangs, in eaves, vents, cracks around windows, through spaces under ill-fitting boards, and around pipes leading into the house. They can squeeze through openings as small as a dime-sized hole, so when the bats are gone make sure to repair or patch all entry points, which are usually dis-

cernible by oily stains. To locate bat entry holes, watch at dusk to see where the bats fly out from. Do *not* patch any holes from May to September or you may entrap flightless juvenile bats inside! Please refer to this site for bat exclusion methods: www.batcon.org.

BEARS

Q: How can I stop bears from getting into my trash can or birdfeeder?

A: Treat bears with respect and give them distance. If you live near bear habitat and you don't want bears on your property, you should not put out a birdfeeder. Bears are attracted to any type of food left outdoors. You can prevent them from coming near your property by storing all food indoors and all trash in airtight garbage cans. You can order bearproof garbage cans and food storage lockers from McClintock Metal Fabricators (800-350-3588 or www.mcclintockmetal.com).

BEAVERS

Q: Beavers in my neighborhood are chewing on trees and building dams that flood roads. What can I do?

A: First, tell your local officials that killing beavers and destroying dams will not solve the problem—migrating beavers will move in and build a new dam. Instead, certain measures such as wrapping hardware cloth around tree bases to prevent felling, or installing perforated PVC or flex pipes through beaver dams to control flooding, are very effective ways to resolve beaver problems. Any state wildlife agency can get free "beaver baffler" materials for landowners through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Partners for Wildlife" program (call the Branch of Habitat Restoration at 703-358-2201 to locate your state coordinator to

find out about this little-known program). Please contact our campaign office (301-585-2591) for our video and brochure on "A New Way to Solve Beaver Problems." The Fund for Animals also provides a hotline specifically for beaver conflict questions at 203-389-4411.

BIRDS

Q: A baby bird fell from the nest and I touched him. Will the parents reject their chick now?

A: It's a myth that birds abandon their chicks if a person touches them. Unlike other animals, birds are not sensitive to human scent. Just put the baby birds back in their nest. If the original nest was destroyed, hang a wicker or woven stick basket close to where the original nest was. (These are the kinds of baskets that flower arrangements come in. They can be purchased inexpensively at supermarket florist departments or garden stores. Many people have them around the house.) Woven stick baskets make perfect substitute nests, and they allow rain to pass through so the birds don't drown. You should watch for an hour to make sure the parents return to the new nest to feed their chicks. If they don't return, or the chicks have no feathers, call your wildlife agency to locate the nearest wildlife rehabilitator.

Q: A bird keeps attacking my window! What's going on?

A: Male birds commonly attack windows during mating season. The bird wrongly assumes that his own reflection is a rival in his territory! You can prevent this by hanging squares of aluminum foil outside the window to break up the reflection or Post-it notes all over the inside of the window.

Q: Pigeons, starlings, or sparrows are roosting on my building. How do I get them to leave?

A: Roosting birds' droppings can be annoying to people. Poisoning is extremely cruel (the intent of some common poisons is to cause extended seizures in birds and supposedly frighten other birds away) and does not solve the problem because other birds will soon move in to fill that vacancy. A better solution is to modify the habitat, which encourages them to go elsewhere. While a flat ledge is attractive to pigeons, a false ledge can be made by placing a board at an angle of at least 45 degrees so that birds will slide off when they land. You can also use bird netting or a stretched-out, nailed-down "Slinky" from a toy store, to make sure birds will not land on your ledges, rafters, or other horizontal surfaces. If you use a

Slinky, stretch it so two fingers fit between the spirals. The Bird Barrier Company specializes in humane bird exclusion devices (call 800-503-5444 for a free catalog or visit www.birdbarrier.com). If bird mites come through the air conditioner, get rid of them by using a mite spray from a pet store.

COYOTES

Q: There are coyotes in my neighborhood and I'm afraid they'll attack my children or pets. What should I do?

A: Coyotes are generally afraid of people, and rarely attack humans. The best thing you can do for cats and small dogs is to keep them indoors—both for their own safety and for the safety of neighboring wildlife. Coyotes are opportunistic eaters, and are attracted to places where they can find "easy pickings" of fruit, trash, or small animals such as mice and rats, etc. You can make sure you don't attract coyotes to your house by taking several additional precautions: (1) don't keep pet food outdoors, (2) pick the fruit from your trees as soon as it ripens and keep rotten fruit off the ground, and (3) keep trash can lids securely fastened and keep trash cans in your garage until collection day.

DEER

Q: If I find a fawn alone, does that mean the fawn is orphaned?

A: People mistakenly assume that a fawn is orphaned if found alone. Rest assured that the mother is nearby. The doe will only visit and nurse her fawn a few times a day to avoid attracting predators. At four weeks old, the fawn will begin to travel with the mother. Just leave the fawn alone unless (1) you know the mother is dead, (2) the fawn keeps bleating, or (3) it is lying on his side. Mother deer are wary of human smells. If you have handled the fawn, rub an old towel in the grass and wipe the fawn to remove human scent. Using gloves, return the fawn to exactly where he or she was found.

Q: How can I stop deer from eating shrubs and flowers in my garden?

A: There are several good deer repellents, such as "Big Game Repellent Deer Away," which is available at garden stores. An 8-foot woven wire fence or high-tensile electric wire fence kit (available at many garden stores) will keep deer away from small gardens if installed properly. The Fund for Animals offers a brochure called "Living With Deer" that describes in detail many of these fencing

techniques, effective repellents, and lists more than 100 types of plants—including marigolds, daffodils, and hydrangeas—that deer generally find unpalatable and will stay away from. To request a free copy of “Living With Deer” please call our campaign office (301-585-2591) or visit our website (www.fund.org).

GEESE

Q: How can I stop geese from defecating on my lawn?

A: Go to your local party store and buy several helium-filled Mylar balloons with weights at the bottom. Set them around your yard—their reflectiveness and bobbing movement will scare the birds away. For information on “Rejex-It,” a grape-flavored goose repellent, call the Bird Barrier Company at 800-503-5444. A new multisensory repellent called “Flight Control” combines a sense of digestive upset with a UV-colored warning system. When applied to grass, it is visible to the geese but not to humans. For other long-term humane solutions to geese-human conflicts, contact Geese Peace (www.GeesePeace.org).

GOPHERS AND WOODCHUCKS

Q: What can I do to prevent gophers and woodchucks from eating the tender roots of plants I've just planted?

A: Before planting, make a fine-meshed chicken-wire basket around the root ball of your plant. Or line your garden with a 3-foot-high floppy chicken-wire fence, which will bend backwards if the woodchuck tries to climb it. Create an L-shaped barrier by sinking hardware cloth 6 inches into the ground and then bend it at a 90-degree angle *away from* the garden for another 12 inches to create a “false bottom,” so they can't dig under the barrier.

MICE AND RATS

Q: How do I rid my house or apartment of mice or rats?

A: You can prevent mice and rats from coming into your home by sealing all holes and small openings (rodents can enter buildings through holes no bigger than 1/2 inch in diameter) with caulking, steel wool, or cement. Use hardware cloth to patch larger holes and to screen all vent openings. Also, it is crucial to store food in secure containers and to make sure lids fit tightly so that you don't attract rodents. If you have mice or rats in your home,

you can order catch-and-release traps from the Tomahawk Live Trap Company (800-272-8727 or www.Livetrap.com) and then release the rodents far away from your home. You must then follow up by rodent-proofing your home or the problem will recur. To catch multiple mice easily, put a 55-gallon garbage can partially under the kitchen counter and put cheese pieces, sunflower seeds, peanut butter mounds, and lids of water inside the can. The mice will walk on the counter, jump into the can, but not be able to climb out.

MOLES

Q: How can I stop moles from tunneling in my yard?

A: The best solution is a new, environmentally friendly repellent called “Mole-Med,” which is available at hardware and garden supply stores or by calling the company directly (800-255-2527). Mole-Med is made of emulsified castor oil and will last one to two months per application, but you should reapply it after heavy rains. Pesticides are never recommended for mole control as they are toxic to humans and domestic animals as well as wildlife.

OPOSSUMS

Q: What should I do if I find a dead opossum on the road?

A: Wearing gloves, you can move the dead animal off the road. If it's spring or summer, check to see if the opossum is a female and if there are live babies still in her pouch or in the immediate area. If found, call your state wildlife agency to locate a wildlife rehabilitator immediately.

RABBITS

Q: What should I do if I find (or my lawnmower hits) a nest of baby rabbits?

A: If the nest is intact, leave it alone! Mother rabbits visit their young only two or three times a day to avoid attracting predators. If the nest has been disturbed, or if you have reason to believe that the babies are orphaned, you can put an “X” of yarn or sticks over the nest to assess if the mother returns to nurse her young. If the “X” is moved by the next day, the mother has returned to nurse them. If the “X” remains undisturbed for 24 hours, call your wildlife agency to locate a rehabilitator. Keep all cats out of the area because they will surely find and kill the helpless young rabbits. Don't touch the babies (unless orphaned) because

mother rabbits are very sensitive to foreign smells and may abandon their young.

Q: What should I do if my cat caught a baby rabbit (or bird)?

A: Unfortunately, scientific studies show that one of the biggest killers of baby rabbits and birds is free-roaming cats. If the rabbit or bird appears unharmed, put the animal back where found and keep your cats indoors. Luckily, rabbits are fully weaned by the time they're only three weeks old and the size of a chipmunk! If you must relocate an older rabbit, use a lawn or field that has brush or other cover nearby.

Look very carefully for puncture wounds, which can be almost imperceptible. If the rabbit or bird has any puncture wounds, bring the animal to a veterinarian or rehabilitator quickly. Cats have toxic bacteria in their mouths, which become lethal unless the victim is put on antibiotics immediately. You can save more wild animals just by keeping your cats indoors. Remember that in the spring and summer, wild animals have helpless babies on the ground where cats can get them. If you absolutely can't keep your cats indoors, you can use multiple-bell collars, which will alert some wild animals to your cats' presence. Also consider purchasing the Cat-Fence-In System, which is a unique, humane barrier that keeps cats from climbing over fences or up trees (for ordering information, call 702-359-4574). Pet supply stores sell a variety of breakaway collars—purchase two additional large bells (sold separately with S-hooks) and attach them to the cat's collar. The bell on most collars is too quiet to do much good, and stealthy cats learn how to keep it still. Therefore, you need two large bells per collar.

RACCOONS

Q: What should I do if raccoons den in my chimney or attic?

A: In spring and summer, mother raccoons may use chimneys and attics as denning sites for raising their cubs. The best solution is to wait a few weeks for the raccoons to move out on their own, which they will do when the cubs are big enough to go on outings. Raccoons rarely create any smell or mess—mother raccoons clean their babies meticulously to avoid attracting predators. Once the raccoons are gone, promptly call a chimney sweep to install a mesh chimney cap (or seal any holes leading to the attic) and this situation will never occur again.

If you must evict a raccoon family, remember that raccoons look for a quiet, dark, and non-noxious-smelling place to raise their young. By creating the opposite conditions, you can encourage them to leave sooner if absolutely necessary. For chimney raccoons, place a blaring radio (all-night rock or rap stations) in the fireplace. Then put a bowl of ammonia on a footstool, just under the damper. For attic raccoons, leave all the lights on and place a blaring radio and some rags sprinkled with 1/4 cup of ammonia around the attic. Apply these deterrents at dusk *only*; even harassed mother raccoons will try to avoid moving their young in daylight. Be sure to get a chimney cap installed once they're gone or this situation will occur again soon. Remember—the only permanent solution is to seal all entry holes once the animals have left.

Q: There's a raccoon in my yard during the daytime. Is the raccoon rabid?

A: Even though raccoons are nocturnal, mother raccoons sometimes forage during the day when they have nursing cubs depleting their energy. Cat food and garbage left outside will attract raccoons to an area. Only if an adult raccoon seen in the daytime is showing abnormal behavior such as paralysis, unprovoked aggression, moving in circles, self-mutilation, making screeching sounds, or showing supreme tameness should you call your local animal control officer or police department and keep people and companion animals away.

Q: What can I do to stop raccoons from continuously knocking over my garbage cans?

A: Overflowing or uncovered garbage cans provide an open invitation for hungry raccoons. The simplest solution is to put out your garbage cans for pickup in the morning, after the nocturnal raccoons have returned to their dens. If you must put out your garbage cans at night, try building a simple wooden box outside and storing your garbage cans in it. For easy access, the top should be hinged and have a latch in front secured with a snap hook. A third option is to get a good plastic garbage can with a 4-inch-high, *twist-on* lid, such as the kind made by Rubbermaid. Keep the can upright by wrapping bungee cords around the middle and securing it to an upright object.

SKUNKS

Q: How do I get a skunk out of my garage?

A: Skunks commonly wander into open garages when the door is left open. Just open the garage

door before dark. Skunks have terrible eyesight, so as long as you move slowly and quietly, the skunk will hardly notice you. Leave a 2-foot band of flour across the outside of the garage and watch for footprints to confirm that the skunk has left. To neutralize any unpleasant odor, a nontoxic deodorizer called "Odors Away" can be purchased at hardware stores for approximately \$4.

Q: There's a skunk in my window well. Why doesn't he jump out?

A: Skunks are not good climbers. They often fall into window wells and can't get out. If the window well is shallow, put a piece of wood in the window well (at a less-than-45-degree angle) to serve as a plank so the skunk can walk out. If the window well is deep, put on gloves and place smelly cat food or cheese in the far corner of a pet carrier or rectangular garbage can (tipped on its side) and slowly lower it into the window well. The skunk will be attracted to the food and will walk into it. Then slowly raise the carrier or can to ground level, elevator-style, and let the skunk stroll out. Skunks have terrible eyesight and will not spray you if you move slowly and talk soothingly to them. Remember, skunks also give a warning by stamping their front feet, which gives you a chance to back off! Most importantly, purchase or make a window well cover out of mesh so this situation doesn't recur.

SQUIRRELS

Q: What should I do if a squirrel has fallen down my chimney?

A: Squirrels commonly fall down chimneys and can't get out. Hang a 3/4-inch-thick rope or long branch down the chimney (securely fastened at the top) so the squirrel can climb out. Then be sure to put a chimney cap on the flue to prevent recurrence. Chimney caps will also prevent squirrels from building shallow nests at the top of the flue, which may make it dysfunctional or a fire hazard in winter. A second option, if the fireplace can be sealed off, is to set a live box trap in the fireplace baited with bread and peanut butter, and open the damper so the squirrel comes down. Check frequently to see when the squirrel goes into the trap and release him outside immediately. Be sure to have a chimney cap installed so this situation doesn't recur.

Q: What if squirrels are nesting in my attic?

A: If the squirrels are in your attic and it's baby season (spring, late summer, or early fall), chances

are good that you have a mother with young. Try to find the nest so you can monitor it. Wait a few weeks until the squirrels leave on their own, or wait until they're fully furred and mobile, and then apply a one-way door over the entry hole. You can make a one-way door or purchase one from Tomahawk (800-272-8727). Once you are certain the squirrels have left, seal the entry hole permanently with hardware cloth. You can spray Miller's Hot Sauce (to order call 800-233-2040) onto the hardware cloth to deter them from trying to chew back in. To prevent access to your roof, trim any overhanging tree branches. You can also put a 3-foot band of sheet metal at least 6 feet above ground, around the base of any tree, to prevent squirrels from climbing up—but first make sure there are no active nests in the tree!

Q: How do I stop squirrels from eating all my bird seed?

A: You may have a difficult time keeping the nimble squirrel away from a free buffet. You can contact your local nature center or Audubon Society, or specialty bird stores, for a good baffler design for a free-standing feeder, or purchase the "Absolute" bird feeder, which has a lever that closes off the bird seed when a heavy animal like a squirrel lands on it. Another newly designed battery-operated bird feeder, "The Yankee Flipper," twirls fast when a squirrel lands on it, literally flipping it off. We strongly discourage the use of any capsaicin-based "hot pepper" powder mix, which, although advertised as a "humane" repellent when mixed with bird seed, reportedly makes squirrels quite sick and can be irritating to birds' eyes as well as to the humans who handle it.

THE PROBLEM WITH TRAPPING

Q: Should I call a wildlife nuisance control operator to trap animals who are bothering me?

A: We advise against trapping unless there's an immediate threat to you, your family, or your companion animals. When animals nest in your attic, chimney, or basement, the best strategy is to give the animals a grace period (especially a mother with young) or, if absolutely necessary, place deterrents such as ammonia-sprinkled rags, a blaring radio, mothballs in socks, or bright lights around the nesting area to encourage their departure. Then find all entry holes and seal them with hardware cloth. Live trapping is very traumatic for wildlife. There are people now in the business of removing "nuisance" animals for pay, yet we have

concerns about the killing methods used by many of them, such as drowning an animal. If you must hire a nuisance wildlife control person, we recommend that you find someone who gives you a written guarantee that he will (1) use nonlethal methods only, (2) release the animals together (so juveniles aren't separated from their mothers) and release them on-site (relocated animals have low survival rates when released in unfamiliar areas), and (3) do the necessary exclusion and repair work to prevent wild animals from entering your home. Ask the right questions so you don't pay hundreds of dollars for an inhumane "solution."

If you have a wildlife problem that is not addressed in this fact sheet, please call The Fund for Animals' Urban Wildlife Hotline at 203-393-1050.

WILDLIFE HELP ON THE WEB

Bat Conservation International
www.batcon.org

Beavers: Wetlands & Wildlife
www.telenet.net/users/beavers

Bird Barrier
www.birdbarrier.com

Cat Claw
www.catclaw.com

Deerbusters
www.deerbusters.com

Deer-Resistant Landscape Nursery
www.deerresistantplants.com
www.flightcontrol.com

Flock Fighters USA
www.flockfighters.com

Geese Peace
www.GeesePeace.org

Living With Deer
www.fund.org/library

McClintock Metal Fabricators
www.mcclintockmetal.com

A New Way to Solve Beaver Problems
www.fund.org/library

Scarecrow
www.scatmat.com/scarecro2.htm

Strieter-Lite Wildlife Reflectors
www.strieter-lite.com

Tomahawk Live Trap Company
www.Livetrapp.com

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