

Living With Wildlife

Tips for Keeping Wildlife at Bay

Wild animals contribute to our enjoyment of nature and outdoor recreation, but they can also damage property, agriculture, and natural resources and threaten human health and safety. The Wildlife Services (WS) program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) assists in solving problems created by wildlife.

Equipped with the right information and tools, most homeowners can solve their own problems and learn to live with wildlife. For example, trimming trees and shrubbery are ways of changing a habitat to make it less attractive to unwanted flocks of birds or even snakes.

The following information may assist in keeping that curious raccoon out of the garbage can, that persistent rabbit or deer out of the garden, that goose or duck out of the backyard pool, that woodpecker off the siding, and that swooping bat out of the attic. Caution should always be taken to avoid overly aggressive animals.

Some wildlife are protected by Federal or State laws and regulations. For information about protected and endangered species and trapping and relocation regulations, contact your State wildlife agency.

Squirrels and Other Rodents

To keep these animals from becoming a permanent part of the family home and yard, screen louvers, vents, and fan openings; keep doors and windows in good repair; tighten eaves; replace rotten boards; cap the chimney; trim overhanging trees; remove bird feeders or use squirrel-proof feeders; and remove acorns and other nuts from the yard. Chipmunks can be deterred by removing denning habitat, which includes logs, rock walls, and stones.

Woodchucks

These animals, also known as groundhogs, sometimes burrow near buildings, browse in gardens, and damage fruit trees and ornamental shrubs. Fencing can help reduce woodchuck damage. The lower edge of the fence should be buried at least 10 inches in the ground to prevent burrowing. The fence should be 3 to 4 feet high, with a surrounding electric hot-shot wire placed 4 to 5 inches off the ground.

Opossums and Skunks

Opossums and skunks become a problem to homeowners by raiding garbage cans and bird feeders; eating pet foods; and living under porches, low decks, open sheds, and any other areas that provide shelter. Skunks also dig holes in lawns, golf courses, and gardens. Both animals sometimes kill poultry and eat eggs. To keep opossums and skunks from denning under buildings, seal off all foundation openings with wire mesh, sheet metal, or concrete. Chicken coops can be protected by sealing all ground-level openings into the buildings and by closing the doors at night. Foraging in garbage cans may be eliminated by providing tight-fitting lids and straps.

Bats

Bats prefer to avoid human contact; however, they are known to establish roosts in attics and abandoned buildings. Building and attic roosts can be eliminated by sealing entry and exit holes (after the bats have left) with such materials as 1/4-inch hardware cloth, caulking, or wire mesh. If a bat makes its way into the house, you can usually encourage it to leave after dark by turning on lights and opening windows and doors.

Rabbits

Rabbits can be kept out of the garden or away from ornamental plants and small trees by using products containing repellents such as Hinder or by placing a 2-foot poultry fence around the area. It is important to bury the fence at least 6 inches beneath the surface of the ground. For information about taste repellents, check your local garden or farm center. Before using any chemical repellents, read the label carefully and check with your State pesticide regulatory agency for application guidelines.

Raccoons

Raccoons are attracted to easy food sources, like garden produce, garbage, and pet food. To help prevent scavenging, use metal trash cans that are fastened to a pole or to another solid object. A strap or latch that secures the lid of the garbage can is also helpful. To keep raccoons out of the garden, use two strands of electric livestock fence. The strands should be placed 4 and 8 inches respectively off the ground and surround the entire garden. Exercise caution when implementing this exclusionary method in urban areas.

Raccoons will also readily inhabit attics, chimneys, and sheds. Use metal flashing and 1-inch-mesh hardware cloth to block entrances.

Snakes

The best way to keep snakes out of your house and yard is to seal cracks and openings around doors, windows, water pipes, attics, and foundations. Removing logs, woodpiles, and high grass and controlling insects and rodents are also helpful. Remove nonpoisonous snakes from inside buildings by placing piles of damp burlap bags in areas where snakes have been seen. After the snakes have curled up beneath the bags, remove the bags and snakes from the building. To remove dangerous snakes, call a professional pest control company.

Woodpeckers

These birds damage buildings by drilling holes into wooden siding, eaves, or trim boards, especially those made of cedar or redwood. If the pecking creates a suitable cavity, the bird may use it for nesting. Effective methods of excluding woodpeckers include placing lightweight mesh nylon or plastic netting on the wooden siding beneath the eaves, covering pecked areas with metal sheathing, and using visual repellents like “eye-spot” balloons.

Deer

Deer feed on row crops, vegetables, fruit trees, nursery stock, stacked hay, and ornamental plants and trees. Deer can be discouraged by removing supplemental food sources and by using scare devices and repellents. The only sure way to eliminate deer damage is to fence the deer out. A wire-mesh fence is effective if it is solidly constructed and at least 8 feet high. Electric fencing also helps reduce damage.

Coyotes and Foxes

These animals may carry rabies and sometimes prey on domestic pets, rabbits, ducks, geese, chickens, young pigs, and lambs. Coyotes also kill calves, goats, and deer. Net-wire and electric fencing will help exclude foxes and coyotes; however, because they are good climbers, a roof of net wire on livestock pens may also be necessary. For more information about fencing, contact your local county extension office.

The protection of livestock and poultry is most important during the spring denning period. Foxes and coyotes will often den close to farm buildings, under haystacks, or inside hog lots or small pastures used for lambing. Shed lambing and farrowing in pro-

tected enclosures can be useful in preventing predation on young livestock. Additionally, noise- and light-making devices, such as the Electronic Guard, may keep these predators away. Guarding dogs are also useful in preventing predation on sheep. Regrettably, dispersal methods are not effective in all situations, so other methods, including trapping or snaring, may have to be used.

Mountain Lions and Bears

As bear and lion habitats continue to decrease, interactions between these animals and humans continue to increase. Bears are noted for destroying cornfields and trees, scavenging in garbage cans, demolishing the interiors of cabins and campers, and killing livestock. Lions are serious predators of sheep, goats, domestic pets, large livestock, poultry, bighorn sheep, and deer. Typical bear and lion predation on sheep leaves 10 or more killed in a single attack, and both species are known to attack humans.

Prevention is the best method of controlling bear and lion damage. Heavy woven and electric fencing can effectively deter bears and lions from attacking livestock and damaging property. Loud music, barking dogs, exploder cannons, fireworks, gunfire, nightlights, scarecrows, and changes in the position of objects in the depredation area often provide temporary relief. The best way to protect pets is to keep them inside an enclosed kennel or shelter. Using guarding dogs, removing garbage and dead carcasses, and placing crops and beehives at considerable distances away from timber and brush may reduce damage by bears. Mountain lions also prefer to hunt where escape cover is close by; removal of brush and trees within a quarter of a mile of buildings and livestock may reduce lion predation.

Professional relocation of damaging mountain lions and bears is sometimes necessary. For more information about State laws and regulations concerning relocation or lethal control of mountain lions and bears, contact your State wildlife agency.

Additional Information

You may obtain more information about how to solve these and other wildlife problems from any State APHIS, WS office. For the address and telephone number in your area, call the WS Operational Support Staff at (301) 734-7921. You can also visit the WS Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws>.

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