

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

Factsheet

May 2010

Living With Wildlife



Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife damage that threatens the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

Equipped with the right information and tools, most homeowners can solve their problems and learn to live with wildlife.

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 WS program assists in solving problems created by wildlife.

Equipped with the right information and tools, most homeowners can solve their problems and learn to live with wildlife. For example, trimming trees and shrubbery can change a habitat and make it less attractive to unwanted bird flocks or even snakes. Limiting food sources can deter predators or unwanted wildlife.

Homeowners can take specific steps to help keep curious raccoons out of the garbage, a persistent rabbit or deer out of the garden, waterfowl out of the backyard pool, a woodpecker off the siding, or a swooping bat out of the attic. Caution should always be taken to avoid overly aggressive animals.

Tips for Keeping Wildlife at Bay

Most wildlife species are protected by Federal or State laws and regulations. For information about threatened and endangered species and trapping and relocation regulations, contact your State wildlife agency or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Squirrels and Other Rodents

To keep these animals from becoming a permanent part of the family home and yard, homeowners can screen louvers, vents, and fan openings; keep doors and windows in good repair; tighten eaves; replace rotten boards; cap chimneys; 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.

Scare devices, repellants, and wire-mesh fencing may discourage deer from feeding on row crops, vegetables, and nursery stock.



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 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.



Simple steps can keep opossums from raiding garbage cans or denning under buildings.

Opossums and Skunks

Opossums and skunks become a homeowner's problem by raiding garbage cans and bird feeders; eating pet foods; and living under porches, or other areas that provide shelter. Skunks also dig 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. Protect chicken coops by sealing all ground-level openings into the buildings and by closing the doors at night. Use tight-fitting lids and straps to eliminate foraging in garbage cans.

Bats

Bats prefer to avoid human contact; however, they are known to roost in attics and abandoned buildings. This can be eliminated by sealing entry and exit holes (after the bats leave) with such materials as 1/4-inch hardware cloth, caulking, or wire mesh. If a bat makes its way into

the house, it can usually be encouraged to leave after dark by turning on lights and opening windows and doors.

Waterfowl

Although most people find a few birds acceptable, problems quickly develop as bird numbers increase. Damage includes overgrazing of grass and plants; accumulation of droppings and feathers; attacks on humans by aggressive birds; and the fouling of water, lawns, and recreational areas. Flocks of geese and other

waterfowl also feed on various crops. Feeding of waterfowl may contribute to conflicts with humans. WS' factsheet on waterfowl contains information on numerous techniques to address these conflicts.

Rabbits

Rabbits can be kept away from gardens, ornamental plants, and small trees by using products containing repellents or by placing a

2-foot poultry fence around the area. The fence must be buried at least 6 inches beneath the ground surface. For information about taste repellents, check local garden or farm centers. Before using any chemical repellents, read the label carefully and check with your State pesticide regulatory agency for application guidelines.

Raccoons

Easy food sources attract raccoons: garden produce, garbage, and pet food. To help prevent scavenging, use metal trash cans fastened to a pole or other solid object. A strap or latch should secure the lid. To keep raccoons out of the garden, use two strands of electric livestock fence placed 4 and 8 inches, respectively, off the ground, surrounding 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.

To keep snakes out of a house, seal cracks and openings around doors, windows, water pipes, attics, and foundations.

Snakes

The best way to keep snakes out of a house is to seal cracks and openings around doors, windows, water pipes, attics, and foundations. A yard can be made less attractive by removing logs, woodpiles, and high grass and controlling insects and rodents. 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. Call a professional pest control company to remove dangerous snakes.

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 for 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 and Mylar strips.

Deer

Deer feed on row crops, vegetables, fruit trees, nursery stock, stacked hay, 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, poultry, 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 vital during the spring denning period. Foxes and coyotes will often den close to farm buildings, under haystacks, or inside hog lots or small lambing pastures. Shed lambing and farrowing in protected enclosures can be useful in preventing predation on young livestock. Additionally, noise- and light-making devices and

Foxes often den close to farm buildings or animal enclosures.



guarding dogs may also aid 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 populations increase and their habitats continue to decrease, interactions between these animals and humans become more frequent. Bears are noted for destroying cornfields and trees, scavenging in garbage cans, demolishing cabin and camper interiors, 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 may leave 10 or more killed in a single attack, and both species are known to attack humans.

To prevent problems, modify habitat and avoid intentional or accidental feeding.

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 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

For more information about solving these and other wildlife problems, please telephone the WS office in your State at 1-866-4USDA-WS, or contact the WS Operational Support Staff at (301) 734-7921. Additionally, you can contact WS by mail at: USDA, APHIS, WS, 4700 River Road, Unit 87, Riverdale, MD 20737.

You can also find information on WS programs by visiting our Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/.



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