



VOLUNTEERS for WILDLIFE

Close Encounters of the Wild Kind

Why Do Wild Animals Become Nuisances?

Hollow trees are used by 150 different varieties of wildlife for nesting sites and food sources. Open fields provide homes and food sources for many more. The destruction of wildlife habitat by clearing land for homes, offices and shopping centers leaves animals with only one alternative - to relocate. Wild creatures have no choice but to use what is available for their needs. In suburban areas this includes attics, chimneys, porches and window wells.



THE TWO-SIDED APPROACH

There must be a two-sided approach to dealing with nuisance wildlife problems. The first is **PREVENTION**. If prevention fails, the second approach is **ENCOURAGING THE ANIMAL TO LEAVE**.

PREVENTION

- 1. Close up entry holes.** Check foundations, eaves, attics, roofs, chimneys and openings under porches for possible entry holes. Cover and seal all such openings with heavy gauge wire mesh over larger area than the entry hole. Cap chimney.
- 2. Do not leave garbage out in plastic bags.** Put garbage in tightly closed metal cans and put the cans in the garage if possible. Plastic bags are easily broken into by raccoons, opossums, dogs and cats. Strewn garbage also attracts rodents. Pouring ammonia over the garbage may discourage animals temporarily until more permanent arrangements can be made.
- 3. Place woodpiles away from the immediate vicinity of the house.** Woodpiles may harbor rodents, termites and carpenter ants and are attractive to many wild creatures. By setting the piles away from the house you are offering an alternative nesting site.
- 4. Cap chimneys.** Raccoons, squirrels, opossums and some birds use chimneys as substitutes for hollow trees.
- 5. Prevent access to the roof.** Trim and/or band trees near the house with a 3 foot wide band of sheet metal or aluminum to prevent animals from climbing up and dropping onto the roof.

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ENCOURAGING ANIMALS TO LEAVE

During the spring nesting season, wild animals may seek entry into attics or chimneys to give birth and raise their young. Professional nuisance wildlife agents will remove nuisance wildlife for a fee. This creates a complex problem because attempts to remove the animals may unintentionally orphan the infants.

If at all possible, tolerance is advised until the young leave the nest. However, the fact that animals nesting in human habitations such as attics can cause damage must not be overlooked. Animals in chimneys cause little damage as long as the flue of the fireplace is secure to prevent them from entering the fireplace. If there are animals in the chimney it may be only a matter of weeks until they leave and the problem resolves itself.

Light, sound and odor can be effective means of persuading the animal to leave. Wild animals want a dark quiet place to raise their young. They will often relocate if these conditions are not met.

LIGHT- A mechanic's trouble light is a handy way to light up an area. It can easily be hung in a chimney or attic. A strong beam from a flashlight illuminating the nesting area is another possibility. Be sure that the light is not a fire hazard.

SOUND- A radio at full volume, tuned to a 24-hour talk or news station is very effective. Animals can get used to music but do not like the constant intrusion of loud human voices in their nesting area.

ODOR- Ammonia soaked rags placed in the animal's sleeping area are disagreeable to it. Saturate the rags daily to keep the odor fresh and strong. Mothballs are another effective repellent.

DO NOT USE AMMONIA OR MOTHBALLS IF THERE ARE BABY ANIMALS as they can cause illness and injury. Allow time for the above methods to work. Animal instinct is very strong and it will take a certain amount of time to persuade the animal to leave.

DON'TS

1. DO NOT APPROACH OR CORNER THE ANIMAL. Animals such as raccoons will attack when cornered,

especially if they are protecting their young.

2. DO NOT LIGHT A FIRE IN THE FIREPLACE TO SMOKE OUT THE ANIMALS. The mother may leave but the babies will be left to burn or die of smoke inhalation.

3. IF THERE ARE YOUNG, DO NOT BLOCK THE ENTRANCE TO THE NEST SITE WHEN YOU SEE THE MOTHER LEAVE. A mother raccoon or squirrel can be extremely destructive in her efforts to get back to her babies.

4. DO NOT LIVE TRAP, REMOVE OR DESTROY THE MOTHER IF THERE ARE BABIES. The orphaned babies will die. The dead animals will attract flies and maggots and create an odor.

PROBLEMS WITH MAMMALS

Raccoons invading garbage

Raccoons have territories and make nightly rounds for food. Leave no garbage cans, dog or cat dishes, food, birdseed, or other attractants out at night. Your home will then soon be eliminated from their nightly rounds.

To have the raccoons removed professionally is a costly and often unsuccessful solution. As long as the garbage is accessible, more raccoons will move in to fill the void left by those removed.

Squirrels invading bird feeders

There are a variety of solutions for this problem. Effective squirrel baffles may be purchased or made from stove pipes. Grease metal poles with vegetable shortening or vegetable oil to make them too slick to climb. Switch from corn or sunflower seeds to safflower seeds. Squirrels dislike these large white seeds but cardinals love them. Rake the feeding area often or use spill-proof feeders so that food is not easily accessible to squirrels in the daytime and other rodents at night.

Animals nesting in the attic

*You may choose to wait until babies are old enough to leave with the mother for short periods. While the animals are gone, secure the opening to prevent return. Squirrels are diurnal and will venture out in the daytime. Raccoons are nocturnal and will leave at dusk and return in the wee hours of the morning.

**Note: Be aware, however, that mammals allowed to remain in the attic for any period of time can cause damage to structures, wires, etc. See page 4 for*

information on live trapping and nuisance wildlife agents.

Animal trapped in house

Seal off the room from other parts of the house. Provide access to the outdoors through an open window or door; provide a ladder or plank for a ramp.

Animal under house or porch

To determine that an animal has left, sprinkle flour or corn starch on the ground next to the entry hole. When you see footprints you can determine that the animal has left. Then plug the hole with steel wool until it can be repaired. If the animal has young, put the steel wool only partially into the opening, but leave room for the mother to vacate her young. Then block the opening permanently.

Squirrels in fireplace

Keep the fireplace door closed. Seal off the room. Put shredded newspaper in a shoe box and secure the top with masking tape. Cut a four inch hole in the side of the box and carefully place it in the fireplace. The squirrel, seeking a place to hide, will run into the box for security. Place a book over the opening in the box. Take the box outside and release the squirrel. You may also try hanging a rope down the chimney into the fireplace. The squirrel can then use it to climb out of the chimney.

Animal trapped in window well

Provide a board covered with cloth or carpeting for traction so that the animal can climb out.

Garden damage

Rabbits, chipmunks and other small creatures can be deterred from the garden by fake snakes made from pieces of garden hose. You can buy fake owl or snake "scarecrows" from local garden centers. Repellents such as Tabasco sauce, garlic, pepper or a product called ROPEL can also be used. To protect bulbs from rodents, place 1/4 inch hardware cloth around them when planting. Flowers will grow through the wire.

Animals digging up the lawn

Raccoons, opossums or crows are usually the culprits. They tear up chunks of lawn to get at the grubs (insect larvae) in the soil. Removing grubs with a grub killer gives the animals no reason to dig. Check with a garden center for an effective grub killer. Try to find one that is safe for pets and wildlife. Another problem may be rats. Rats dig tunnels up to 4 inches in diameter and leave a mound of earth at

the well used entrance and exit holes. Discourage rats by eliminating food sources such as bird seed, garbage, etc.

PROBLEMS WITH BIRDS

Drilling holes in house

Woodpeckers will drill in search of insects they hear in the wood. Check the siding of the house for termites and carpenter ants. To discourage birds, nail metal over the holes, hang metal pie pans to clatter nearby and/or hang rubber snakes in the vicinity. Plastic streamers hung from the eaves may be effective. A suet feeder placed nearby may redirect feeding efforts. There is also a woodpecker repellent called ROPEL which is available at your local garden center.

Nesting in attic, air conditioners, dryer vents and eaves of homes

House sparrows and starlings are common nesters in these areas. They are not protected wildlife species and their nesting material can be removed whenever observed. If a nest with eggs must be removed, be assured that the birds will rebuild and lay more eggs. Once the nesting material is removed, cover all holes and niches around the house to prevent future access.

Nesting on porches, in house plants and other containers

Carolina wrens and house finches are fond of such nest sites. Be patient and try not to disturb the nest until after the young have fledged (left the nest). Your patience will be rewarded as these birds eat their share of harmful insects. If the nest must be moved, try moving it (in its container, i.e. the house plant, etc.) a few feet at a time over a period of days. Or move the nest to a similar container within a foot or two of the original nest site. NOTE: Be alert to the fact that when the young fledge they will spend up to two weeks on the ground learning how to fly. This is a critical period in their development and the birds should not be "rescued" simply because they can not fly.

Birds pecking at windows or swooping toward people or pets

This occurs during the baby bird season when the parents are exhibiting protective and territorial behavior. In an extreme situation, use an open umbrella when in the bird's territory. Do not over-

react; this is a temporary problem. After the young leave the nest the family leaves the immediate area.

Birds in garden

Use clattering noises to frighten the birds away. Hang pie tins, can lids and bells to clatter and ring in the breeze. Hang an owl decoy (check in seed catalogs).

Bird trapped in house or building

Turn off lights and close all curtains to make the room as dark as possible. Close off room from other parts of the house and open one window or door to provide access to the outdoors. An alternative is to wait until after dark. Watch where the bird goes to roost; once "gone to roost" the bird will not fly. As you approach, leaving lights off, firmly but gently grasp the bird off the roosting spot and put it in a small carton with air holes. In the morning, release outdoors.

Bird in chimney or fireplace

If in the chimney, try hanging a thick rope or sheeting down the chimney to help the bird reach the top. If in the fireplace, cover the opening with cloth. Prepare a shoe box with a hole cut in one end large enough for the bird to enter. Place the box and a lamp or flashlight on the fireplace floor. The bird will probably go in the "hole". Cover the hole with a book and carefully carry the box outdoors. Release the bird.

Hawks near bird feeders

Cooper's hawks and sharp-shinned hawks are sometimes observed stationed near bird feeders. These are our only common bird eating hawks and their numbers are limited. Remember, predators are essential to a healthy natural ecosystem. There are many more songbirds than hawks and a balance must be maintained for the good of all. Because of their importance to the environment and their declining numbers, all hawks and owls are protected by federal and state laws. To give songbirds a chance to escape predators, install bird feeders near shrubs and bushes to provide cover near the feeding station.

LIVE TRAPPING

Hav-A-Hart, Tomahawk, or other live box traps can be used to remove animals from attics. They may be purchased or rented at hardware or equipment rental stores. Be sure you know how to use the trap properly. It must be checked at least once each day.

Have a plan in mind as to what you will do with the animal after it is trapped. New York State law says that it is illegal to transport wildlife without a permit. Contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) at (631) 444-0310 or 423-0305 for information about relocating wildlife. If there is a mother with young, keep the family together.

NUISANCE WILDLIFE AGENTS

Nuisance Wildlife Agents are licensed by the NYS DEC to remove nuisance wildlife upon request by the homeowner. They are allowed to charge a fee for their services. To get the name of a Licensed Nuisance Wildlife Agent, contact the NYS DEC at (631) 444-0310 or 423-0305. If you are concerned about the disposition of the wildlife to be removed, consult with the NYS DEC and the Agent.

A FINAL WORD

As you close your home to unwanted wildlife, try to provide alternate habitat in your yard. Leave dead trees standing if they do not threaten buildings or houses. Perhaps trimming branches is all that is required. Nest boxes, hollow logs, natural cavities in wood piles, and bird feeders encourage wildlife to live peacefully side by side with humans.

Natural habitats must be preserved in order to ensure that native wildlife species will be able to survive here on Long Island.

Volunteers for Wildlife is available to answer your questions about wildlife. Call our Wildlife Advisory Telephone Network at **(631) 423-0982**.

Volunteers for Wildlife is a non-profit charitable organization formed to help distressed wildlife on Long Island. The organization operates Long Island's only fully equipped and staffed Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center. Our work is made possible by concerned people like you. If you would like to support the continuation of our work, please send a contribution to Volunteers for Wildlife, 27 Lloyd Harbor Road, Huntington, New York 11743. Individual membership starts at \$25.00.