

## **Urban Wild Animals Have Set Up Housekeeping on Your Property. What to Do?**

Don't panic. Take some time to think and understand what exactly is going on. Look to see how many raccoons, opossums, squirrels, etc. there are and where their den is and where they got in. What hours do they keep as they go about their daily and nightly affairs? Is the animal a mother with little babies? Exclusion techniques should not be implemented until you are absolutely certain that ALL ANIMALS are out of the space to be blocked off. If young are present, please wait until they are old enough for their mother to walk them out and then secure the entry points. Otherwise, the young will starve and you will have other unpleasant problems to solve. The babies begin to go out with mom in a few to several weeks. *It is never wise to use live traps—hundreds of mother wild animals are separated from their helpless young every year as a result of the use of these so-called humane devices.*

It is natural for wildlife to seek shelter. Caves, hollow logs, and large abandoned bird nests suffice in the wild, but in the city the substitutes are attics, crawl spaces, or chimneys. Animals are intelligent, but they should not be expected to know that they are "trespassing." After securing these areas, pay close attention during the day, as well as at night, for any sounds of scratching or whining. This would indicate that an animal has been trapped inside and you will need to immediately give the animal an exit.

Check porches, decks, sheds, and garages for holes or weak areas and securely seal them off. Regularly check the roof and eaves and block all holes using galvanized sheet metal. On open vents, use rustproof screening. Make sure there are no animals living inside at the time. Keep garage and shed doors shut at night. If an animal goes into a garage or shed, simply leave the door open for a few hours after dark and she will leave.

### **Securing Refuse:**

#### **Make an Animal-Proof Garbage Can**

When you adapt your garbage can, remember that wild animals are intelligent and agile, but they are not stronger than a human. If you cannot easily pull the cover away bare-handed, you will have defeated any effort made by animals to gain entry. Your garbage can should have a lid that fits tightly. If this isn't possible, you might try hooking a bungee cord from one side of the can to the other to secure the lid. Or you could try placing a large rock on top of the lid to secure it. Usually raccoons gain entry into garbage cans by tipping them over. For this reason it helps to have the cans stored in racks, or tied in an upright position. Put your garbage out the morning of pick-up instead of in the evening. Most native wild animals are nocturnal and, thus, usually feed at night. If you live near a restaurant, ask the manager to ensure that the refuse bin lid is closed nightly.

## **Cap Chimneys**

All chimneys should be capped to prevent entry by wild birds and mammals. The average cost of capping a chimney is far less than the cost of removing trapped wildlife. Chimney caps also prevent sparks from leaving the chimney and are therefore a safety device as well.

## **Birds in the Chimney**

First, close all exits from the fireplace room to other areas of the house. Open windows and doors that lead to the outside, and remove any window screens. Open the damper so that the bird can get out of the chimney. She can then fly outside. Some chimneys have a metal door on the outside, and can be opened to allow the bird to leave.

## **Raccoons & Squirrels in the Chimney**

Note that sometimes these animals are coming in and out. In that case the repelling techniques listed below should be used. If they are trapped, several sheets tied together or a thick knotted rope can be put down into the chimney. Weigh down the sheet or rope with a heavy object so it will easily go down the chimney. Anchor the sheet or rope at the top. The animal should be able to climb out. Be sure to get the chimney capped to prevent further occurrences. Music and ammonia-soaked rags in the fireplace may encourage the animal to leave more quickly IF they are able to do so under their own power.

## **Attics & Crawl Spaces**

If a wild animal has gained entrance to a crawl space or attic and there is more than one point of entry, you need to know which hole is being used. Cover all holes with a thin piece of plastic or stuff a rag or ball of paper into it so that the animal has to remove it to depart. If it is gone the next day, the hole is being used. To encourage mammals to leave, leave a repellent in the form of ammonia bags (cloth bags filled with ammonia-soaked rags) or place a radio in the space with the dial turned to a rock station at high volume. You can also try shining a bright light into their home. Be aware that most native mammals are nocturnal and if they are startled and driven from their home in the light of day they can easily be in danger of being hit by cars or attacked by dogs.

## **When Not to Live-Trap**

Most species of native wildlife have their young from early spring (March) to early fall (September–October). During this period there may be babies who are entirely dependent upon their mother for food and protection who are occupying your attic or backyard shed. Any action that prevents the mother from caring for her young will result in suffering for her and a slow death for the babies. Since the family will not stay forever, or even for a very long time (a month or two and usually less), it is better to wait until the family vacates and then take action that will prevent the same thing from happening again. Be aware that live-trapping and relocating any wild animal only creates a vacancy for more to move in and if you remove a resident wild animal or two you may soon find that you

have encouraged four or five to take their place. Exclusion methods and some degree of tolerance are ultimately more successful and lasting.

## **Exclusions Techniques**

Animal control experts have come to realize the importance of securing entry points in preventing many chronic wildlife concerns. Most exclusion techniques are humane, as well as long-lasting and cost-effective. Make sure there are no animals living inside before using any exclusion technique.

### **Trim Branches**

Raccoons and other wildlife may gain entry to your roof via trees or branches that extend to your roof or slightly above it (remember they can jump short distances). Keep larger branches trimmed so they do not come within reach of your house.

### **Protecting Your Garden**

Protecting a garden from raccoons, skunks, and opossums can be more difficult than protecting your home. Sometimes raccoons roll up new sod in search of June bug larvae and other invertebrates. The only precaution you can take is to drive long wire pins or wooden stakes into the sod to hold it down until it takes root. However, keep in mind that June bugs may ultimately do more damage than the raccoons. June bug larvae may damage the roots of the grass and may kill the lawn. In rural areas, low-voltage electric fencing may help protect gardens and crops from raccoon damage. Proper fencing and other deterrents such as cayenne pepper, commercial products made to repel wildlife, allowing dogs to urinate in the area. **Once you are sure that all animals have left,** sprinkle ammonia, or naphtha flakes (the active ingredient in mothballs) to change the smell of the area. Then close the final point of entry. Once all of the animals are out of the space, the hole through which they gained entry can be sealed with sheet metal or other durable materials. Remember that preventive measures and regular inspections of your home will eliminate most problems with wildlife.

### **Orphaned Wildlife**

Many raccoons, squirrels, and birds are killed or orphaned when the tree in which their nest is located is removed. Please do not cut down or trim a tree or demolish an abandoned building or brush piles in the spring or early summer until you are sure that it contains no nesting raccoons or any other wildlife. If you closely scrutinize your trees and shrubs you will be able to see bird and squirrel nests; if you slowly remove a brush pile, taking out a limb or two a day, you can alert the animal who has made her home there to move on before the entire pile has been removed.

In most cases, we will advise you to leave him outside near the area where you found him, preferably in a hollow tree trunk or in a cardboard box with warm bedding. We do this in order to give the mother time she needs to reclaim her baby. This has been such a

successful procedure over the years that it is worth the time and effort required as wild babies and their mothers belong together and any time we can reunite them they are happier and safer. Make sure he is safe from inclement weather and dogs or cats. Observe him for 24 hours. Remember that a wild animal mother is best equipped to care for her young, not a human substitute.

## **Additional Techniques**

### **Repelling**

*Note: the products listed are not manufactured for the purpose of repelling wildlife; they are recommended because they have been documented as effective non-lethal methods.*

For animals in the attic or under the house, make sure the animal has one easy-to-locate exit. Block all other exits. Obtain six to twelve one-inch strips of fabric, tie them in tight knots and soak them in household ammonia. Then, wearing rubber gloves, place these under the house or in the attic where the animal has been seen or heard. Or try cayenne pepper. Sprinkle it generously in areas where the animal has been seen coming and going, such as a hole leading under the house or around trees that give the animal access to the attic. Be sure to wear rubber gloves and do not inhale the dust. Wild animals cannot tolerate the presence of pepper and will vacate the area. Note that pets and children should not have access to the pepper! It can be washed away with water or by the rain. Once these techniques are used for several days, tape a piece of newspaper over the hole. If it is not disturbed for several more days, cover the hole securely. The animal will not be trapped in the attic or under the house. Several other techniques can also help with animals in the attic or under the house. Lights temporarily placed in these areas can disturb the animals so they will leave. Also, playing loud music during the day will disturb skunks, raccoons, and opossums that sleep during the day.