



# CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Craig A. Kelley  
City Councilor

**FROM:** Craig Kelley, Cambridge City Council  
**TO:** Cambridge City Council  
**DATE:** 6 May, 2010  
**SUBJECT:** Raccoons and Rats

Dear Colleagues:

At our last meeting, there was some confusion about the benefits that raccoons may pose in an urban environment.

As the attached articles note, raccoons do eat rats. As do possums. Additionally, unless cornered, in a human home or treated as a pet, they should not be dangerous.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

# Living with Wildlife

## Raccoons

The raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is a native mammal, measuring about 3 feet long, including its 12-inch, bushy, ringed tail. Because their hind legs are longer than the front legs, raccoons have a hunched appearance when they walk or run. Each of their front feet has five dexterous toes, allowing raccoons to grasp and manipulate food and other items (Fig. 1).

Raccoons prefer forest areas near a stream or water source, but have adapted to various environments throughout Washington. Raccoon populations can get quite large in urban areas, owing to hunting and trapping restrictions, few predators, and human-supplied food.

Adult raccoons weigh 15 to 40 pounds, their weight being a result of genetics, age, available food, and habitat location. Males have weighed in at over 60 pounds. A raccoon in the wild will probably weigh less than the urbanized raccoon that has learned to live on handouts, pet food, and garbage-can leftovers.

As long as raccoons are kept out of human homes, not cornered, and not treated as pets, they are not dangerous.

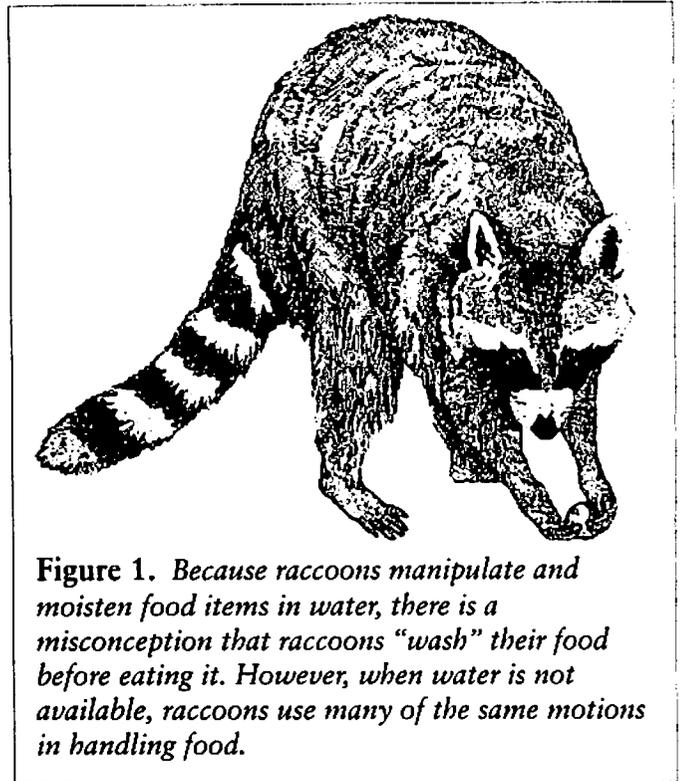
### Facts about Raccoons

#### Food and Feeding Habitats

- Raccoons will eat almost anything, but are particularly fond of creatures found in water—clams, crayfish, frogs, fish, and snails.
- Raccoons also eat insects, slugs, dead animals, birds and bird eggs, as well as fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Around humans, raccoons often eat garbage and pet food.
- Although not great hunters, raccoons can catch young gophers, squirrels, mice, and rats.
- Except during the breeding season and for females with young, raccoons are solitary. Individuals will eat together if a large amount of food is available in an area.

#### Den Sites and Resting Sites

- Dens are used for shelter and raising young. They include abandoned burrows dug by other mammals, areas in or under large rock piles and brush piles, hollow logs, and holes in trees.
- Den sites also include wood duck nest-boxes, attics, crawl spaces, chimneys, and abandoned vehicles.
- In urban areas, raccoons normally use den sites as daytime rest sites. In wooded areas, they often rest in trees.
- Raccoons generally move to different den or daytime rest site every few days and do not follow a predictable pattern. Only a female with young or an animal “holed up” during a cold spell will use the same den for any length of time. Several raccoons may den together during winter storms.



**Figure 1.** *Because raccoons manipulate and moisten food items in water, there is a misconception that raccoons “wash” their food before eating it. However, when water is not available, raccoons use many of the same motions in handling food.*

## **Reproduction and Home Range**

- Raccoons pair up only during the breeding season, and mating occurs as early as January to as late as June. The peak mating period is March to April.
- After a 65-day gestation period, two to three kits are born.
- The kits remain in the den until they are about seven weeks old, at which time they can walk, run, climb, and begin to occupy alternate dens.
- At eight to ten weeks of age, the young regularly accompany their mother outside the den and forage for themselves. By 12 weeks, the kits roam on their own for several nights before returning to their mother.
- The kits remain with their mother in her home range through winter, and in early spring seek out their own territories.
- The size of a raccoon's home range as well as its nightly hunting area varies greatly depending on the habitat and food supply. Home range diameters of 1 mile are known to occur in urban areas.

## **Mortality and Longevity**

- Raccoons die from encounters with vehicles, hunters, and trappers, and from disease, starvation, and predation.
- Young raccoons are the main victims of starvation, since they have very little fat reserves to draw from during food shortages in late winter and early spring.
- Raccoon predators include cougars, bobcats, coyotes, and domestic dogs. Large owls and eagles will prey on young raccoons.
- The average life span of a raccoon in the wild is 2 to 3 years; captive raccoons have lived 13.

## **Viewing Raccoons**

Raccoons can be seen throughout the year, except during extremely cold periods. Usually observed at night, they are occasionally seen during the day eating or napping in a tree or searching elsewhere for food. Coastal raccoons take advantage of low tides and are seen foraging on shellfish and other food by day.

## **Trails**

Raccoons use trails made by other wildlife or humans next to creeks, ravines, ponds, and other water sources. Raccoons often use culverts as a safe way to cross under roads. With a marsh on one side of the road and woods on the other, a culvert becomes their chief route back and forth. Look for raccoon tracks in sand, mud, or soft soil at either end of the culvert.

In developed areas, raccoon travel along fences, next to buildings, and near food sources.

## **Tracks, Scratch Marks, and Similar Signs**

Look for tracks in sand, mud, or soft soil, also on deck railings, fire escapes, and other surfaces that raccoons use to gain access to structures (Fig. 2). Tracks may appear as smudge marks on the side of a house where a raccoon shimmies up and down a downspout or utility pipe.

Sharp, nonretractable claws and long digits make raccoons good climbers. Like squirrels, raccoons can rotate their hind feet 180 degrees and descend trees headfirst. (Cats' claws don't rotate and they have to back down trees.) Look for scratch marks on trees and other structures that raccoons climb.

Look for wear marks, body oil, and hairs on wood and other rough surfaces, particularly around the edges of den entrances. The den's entrance hole is usually at least 4 inches high and 6 inches wide.

## Droppings

Raccoon droppings are crumbly, flat-ended, and can contain a variety of food items. The length is 3 to 5 inches, but this is usually broken into segments. The diameter is about the size of the end of your little finger.

Raccoons leave droppings on logs, at the base of trees, and on roofs (raccoons defecate before climbing trees and entering structures). Raccoons create toilet areas—inside and outside structures—away from the nesting area. House cats have similar habits.

**Note:** Raccoon droppings may carry a parasite that can be fatal to humans. Do not handle or smell raccoon droppings and wash your hands if you touch any. (See “Public Health Concerns”.)

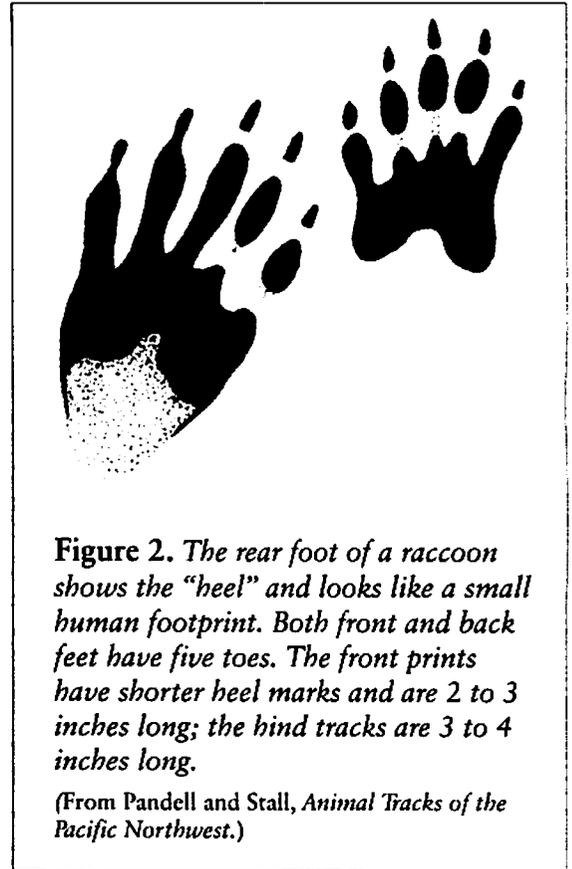
## Calls

Raccoons make several types of noises, including a purr, a chittering sound, and various growls, snarls, and snorts.

## Preventing Conflicts

A raccoon’s search for food may lead it to a vegetable garden, fish pond, garbage can, or chicken coop. Its search for a den site may lead it to an attic, chimney, or crawl space. The most effective way to prevent conflicts is to modify the habitat around your home so as not to attract raccoons. Recommendations on how to do this are given below:

**Don’t feed raccoons.** Feeding raccoons may create undesirable situations for you, your children, neighbors, pets, and the raccoons themselves. Raccoons that are fed by people often lose their fear of humans and may become aggressive when not fed as expected. Artificial feeding also tends to concentrate raccoons in a small area; overcrowding can spread diseases and parasites. Finally, these hungry visitors might approach a neighbor who



**Figure 2.** *The rear foot of a raccoon shows the “heel” and looks like a small human footprint. Both front and back feet have five toes. The front prints have shorter heel marks and are 2 to 3 inches long; the hind tracks are 3 to 4 inches long.*

(From Pandell and Stall, *Animal Tracks of the Pacific Northwest*.)

## Raccoons Too Close for Comfort

If a raccoon ever approaches too closely, make yourself appear larger: stand up if sitting, shout, and wave your arms. If necessary, throw stones or send the raccoon off with a dousing of water from a hose or bucket.

If a raccoon continues to act aggressively or strangely (circling, staggering as if drunk or disoriented, or shows unnatural tameness) it may be sick or injured. In such a case, call a wildlife rehabilitator or your local wildlife office.

If aggressive raccoons are routinely seen in your area, prepare your children for a possible encounter. Explain the reasons why raccoons live there (habitat, food sources, species adaptability) and what they should do if one approaches them. By shouting a set phrase such as “Go away raccoon!” when they encounter one, instead of a general scream, children will inform nearby adults of the raccoon’s presence. Demonstrate and rehearse encounter behavior with the children.

If a raccoon finds its way into your house, stay calm, close surrounding interior doors, leave the room, and let the animal find its way back out through the open door, window, or pet door. If necessary, gently use a broom to corral the raccoon outside. (Do not corner a raccoon, thereby forcing it to defend itself.)

doesn't share your appreciation of the animals. The neighbor might choose to remove these raccoons, or have them removed.

**Don't give raccoons access to garbage.** Keep your garbage can lid on tight by securing it with rope, chain, bungee cords, or weights. Better yet, buy garbage cans with clamps or other mechanisms that hold lids on. To prevent tipping, secure side handles to metal or wooden stakes driven into the ground. Or keep your cans in tight-fitting bins, a shed, or a garage. Put garbage cans out for pickup in the morning, after raccoons have returned to their resting areas.

**Feed dogs and cats indoors and keep them in at night.** If you must feed your pets outside, do so in late morning or at midday, and pick up food, water bowls, leftovers, and spilled food well before dark every day.

**Keep pets indoors at night.** If cornered, raccoons may attack dogs and cats. Bite wounds from raccoons can result in fractures and disease transmission.

**Prevent raccoons from entering pet doors.** Keep indoor pet food and any other food away from a pet door. Lock the pet door at night. If it is necessary to have it remain open, put an electronically activated opener on your pet's collar. *Note:* Floodlights or motion detector lights placed above the pet door to scare raccoons are not long-term solutions.

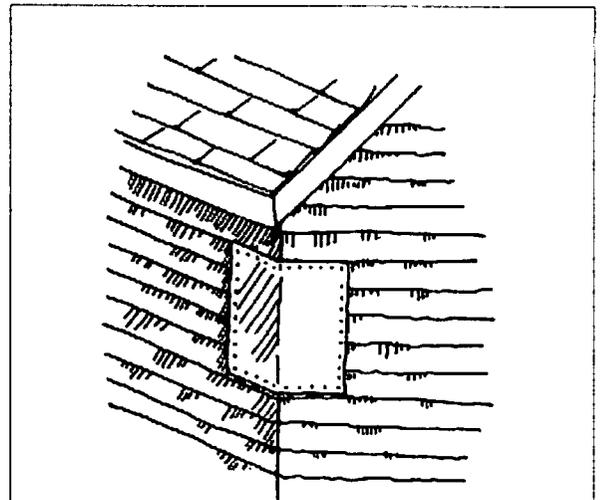
**Put food in secure compost containers and clean up barbecue areas.** Don't put food of any kind in open compost piles; instead, use a securely covered compost structure or a commercially available raccoon-proof composter to prevent attracting raccoons and getting exposed to their droppings. A covered worm box is another alternative. If burying food scraps, cover them with at least 8 inches of soil and don't leave any garbage above ground in the area—including the stinky shovel.

**Clean barbecue grills and grease traps thoroughly** following each use.

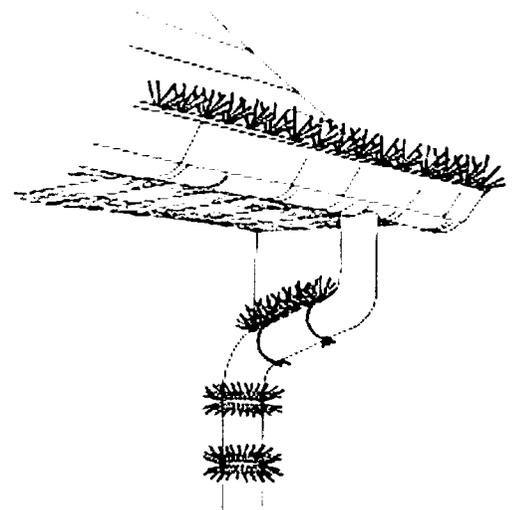
**Eliminate access to denning sites.** Raccoons commonly use chimneys, attics, and spaces under houses, porches, and sheds as den sites. Close any potential entries with ¼-inch mesh hardware cloth, boards, or metal flashing. Make all connections flush and secure to keep mice, rats, and other mammals out. Make sure you don't trap an animal inside when you seal off a potential entry (see the handout "Evicting Animals from Buildings"). For information on securing chimneys, see "Raccoons in Dumpsters and Down Chimneys."

**Prevent raccoons from accessing rooftops** by trimming tree limbs away from structures and by attaching sheets of metal flashing around corners of buildings (Fig. 3). Commercial products that prevent climbing are available from farm supply centers and bird-control supply companies on the Internet (Fig. 4). Remove vegetation on buildings, such as English ivy, which provide raccoons a way to climb structures and hide their access point inside.

**Enclose poultry (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) in a secure outdoor pen and house.** Raccoons will eat poultry and their eggs if they can get to them. Signs of raccoon predation include the



**Figure 3.** Raccoon access to rooftops can be eliminated by installing sheets of aluminum flashing, at least 3 feet square, around the corners of buildings.



**Figure 4.** Commercially available metal or plastic spikes can help keep raccoons off of buildings.

(Drawings by Jenifer Rees.)

birds' heads bitten off and left some distance away, only the bird's crop being eaten, stuck birds pulled half-way through a fence, and nests in severe disarray. **Note:** Other killers of poultry include coyotes, foxes, skunks, feral cats, dogs, bobcats, opossums, weasels, eagles, hawks, owls, other poultry, and disease.

If a dead bird is found with no apparent injuries, skinning it may determine what killed it. If the carcass is patterned by red spots where pointed teeth have bruised the flesh but not broken the skin, the bird was probably "played with" by one or more dogs until it died.

## **Raccoons in Dumpsters and Down Chimneys**

Raccoons are enticed by the food smells in dumpsters. When the lids are open they climb in and can't climb the slippery sides to get out. To help them escape, put a strong branch or board in the dumpster for the raccoons to climb out on.

If your disposal company leaves dumpster lids open, install a sign telling employees that it's vital to keep the lid closed so animals don't get trapped inside. Consider installing a totally enclosed trash-compacting dumpster. The trash is deposited in the front and regularly compacted.

In spring and summer, a female raccoon may be enticed into the dark, quiet, and secure environment of your chimney for a nesting place.

If you hear a large animal on the roof, or growls and whines coming from the chimney at night, there is probably a raccoon family inside. Using a powerful flashlight during the day, look for a raccoon down the chimney. (If spider webs are strung across the inside, you can be reasonably sure that no animal is using the chimney.)

The easiest solution to removing raccoons from a chimney is to wait for them to move on their own. After eight to ten weeks the female and young will leave and not return.

If raccoons need to be evicted, do not smoke them out and do not pour anything, including naphtha flakes or mothballs, down the chimney. Adult raccoons can easily climb out of a chimney, but the babies can't. The concentrated vapors can also damage the infant raccoons' mucous membranes and make an adult raccoon extremely agitated while attempting to flee from the vapors.

Instead, harass the adult female using the following methods until being there is no longer worth her effort. She will move her young to an alternate den, one by one, holding them by the back of the neck in her mouth.

**Note:** Any time you try to evict any mother animal, there is a chance that she may leave some or all of the babies behind.

To encourage the female raccoon to leave:

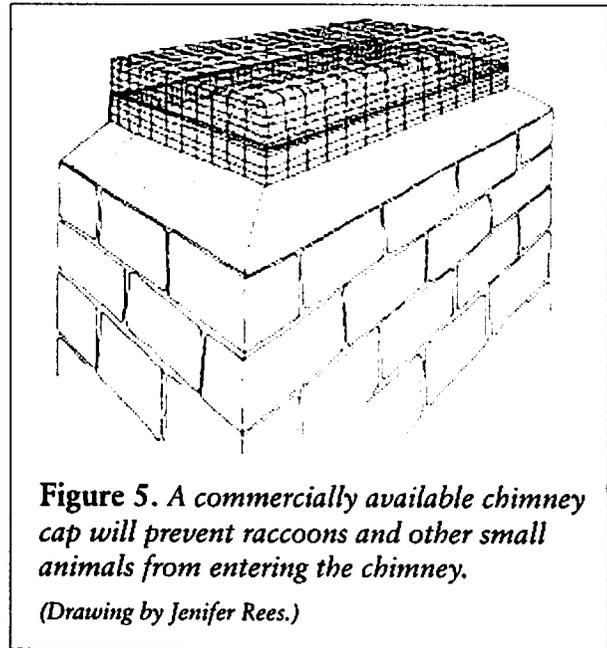
1. Keep the chimney damper closed and put a loud radio tuned to a talk station in the fireplace.
2. With a short broomstick, pole, or board, bang on the underside of the damper as frequently as possible.
3. Wearing gloves, sprinkle coyote urine, or raccoon eviction fluid (available from farm supply centers, hunting stores, and the Internet) on a rag and wedge it in above the damper. If none of these natural repellents are available, place a bowl containing a cup of ammonia on a footstool just under the damper. If needed, open the damper 1/8-inch. Most dampers are not airtight. Keep what deterrents you can in place 24

hours a day during a period of mild weather, and give the raccoons two to three nights to move out. On the night of departure there may be a lot of racket caused by the female raccoon's frequent climbing up and down the chimney as she retrieves her young.

In urban areas, harassment techniques may not work owing to raccoons' familiarity with humans. In such cases, call a wildlife damage control company and have them assess the situation (call your WDFW Regional Wildlife Office for a list of Wildlife Damage Control Companies).

To make sure the eviction process was successful, shine a powerful flashlight down the chimney during the day and look for raccoons. Tap the chimney with a hard object and listen for any sounds of movement. If a young raccoon is left behind, it may be that the mother has abandoned it. In these rare cases it is best to hire a wildlife damage control company to remove the animal.

Once the raccoons are gone, promptly call a professional chimney sweep to remove any debris and to install a commercially designed and engineered chimney cap (homemade caps are often unsafe and may be a fire hazard). You can still have fires in your fireplace; however, the "cap" will keep raccoons and other wildlife out (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5.** A commercially available chimney cap will prevent raccoons and other small animals from entering the chimney.

*(Drawing by Jenifer Rees.)*

To prevent raccoons and other animals from accessing birds in their night roosts, equip poultry houses with well-fitted doors and secure locking mechanisms. A raccoon's dexterous paws make it possible for it to open various types of fasteners, latches, and containers.

To prevent raccoons and other animals from accessing poultry during the day, completely enclose outdoor pens with 1-inch chicken wire placed over a sturdy wooden framework. Overlap and securely wire all seams on top to prevent raccoons from forcing their way in by using their weight and claws. To prevent raccoons from reaching in at ground level, surround the bottom 18 inches of the pen with smaller-mesh wire.

See Figures 3, 4, 6 for examples of how to prevent raccoons from climbing enclosures.

**Fence orchards and vegetable gardens.** Raccoons can easily climb wood or wire fences, or bypass them by using overhanging limbs of trees or shrubs. See Figures 6 and 8 for examples of ways to prevent raccoons from climbing fences and accessing crops at ground level. Wire fences will need to have a mesh size that is no wider than 3 inches to keep young raccoons out.

**Protect fruit trees, bird feeders, and nest boxes.** To prevent raccoons from climbing fruit trees, poles, and other vertical structures, install a metal or heavy plastic barrier (Fig. 7). Twenty-four-inch long aluminum or galvanized vent-pipe, available at most hardware stores, can serve as a premade barrier around a narrow support. **Note:** Raccoons will attempt to use surrounding trees or structures as an avenue to access the area above the barrier.

Alternatively, a funnel-shaped piece of aluminum flashing can be fitted around the tree or other vertical structure. The outside edge of the flared metal should be a minimum of 18 inches away from the support. Cut the material with tin snips and file down any sharp edges.

Regularly pick up fallen birdseed and fruit to prevent attracting raccoons.

**Discourage raccoons from disturbing pond plants and other aquatic life.** Raccoons are attracted to ponds

because they associate them with a food source. While a motion-activated light or sprinkler, or your shouting may scare off a raccoon, this is usually temporary. A raccoon, especially an urban raccoon, may run away the first night, walk away the second night, but, if there's no additional deterrent, by the third or fourth night the animal will be back with the light shining brightly or the sprinkler sprinkling strongly.

Always give fish a safe place to hide by constructing hiding places on the bottom of the pond. Use cinder blocks, ceramic drain tile, wire baskets, or upside-down plastic crates held in place with heavy rocks.

To prevent raccoons from disturbing aquatic plants in containers, use containers that are too heavy or wide for raccoons to overturn. Securing chicken wire over the top of the containers will prevent raccoons from disturbing the soil inside.

Although it's awkward looking, small ponds can be completely covered with a barrier that can be left on permanently or removed daily. Since raccoons are most active after dark, be sure the pond is covered at night. Examples of barriers include one-inch mesh chicken wire laid over the surface and held in place with stakes—raccoons will walk on the barrier and try and go under it. (While black bird-netting is less conspicuous, raccoons and other animals can easily get entangled in it.) A wooden or PVC pipe frame covered with wire mesh can also be built to cover the pond. Maneuvering over pond plants with any of the above can be difficult.

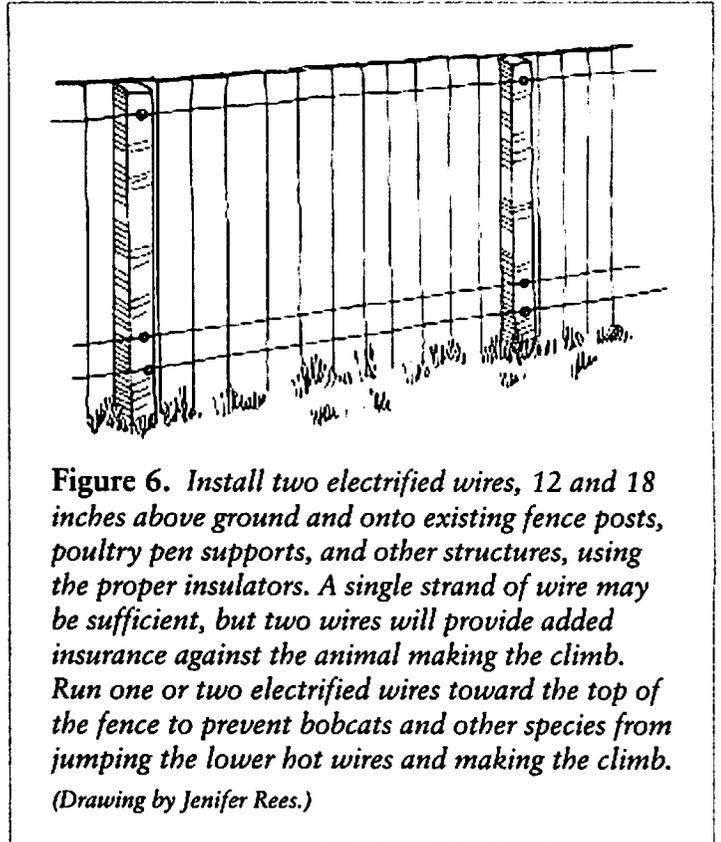
An alternative frame can be constructed from heavy plastic lattice available from home improvement centers.

Carefully cut the lattice so it fits in the pond; cut out pieces to accommodate any pond plants. Cover the lattice with bird netting (with the solid backing, animals are less likely to become entangled in the netting). The netting can be glued to the lattice using Shoe Goo® or other waterproof glue.

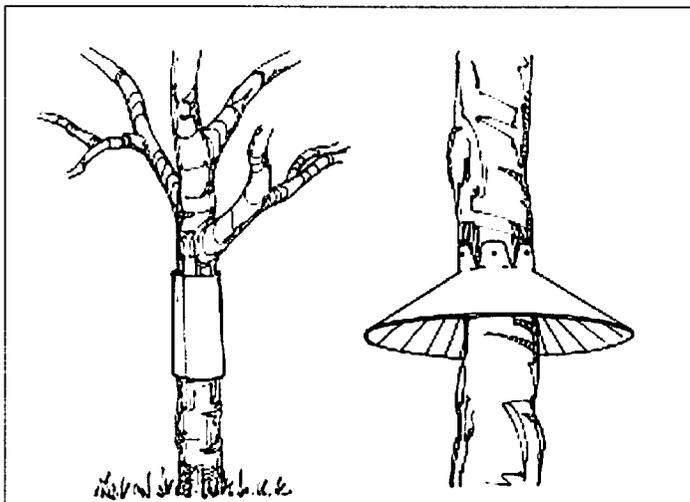
For larger ponds, stake 2-foot wide strips of chicken wire flat around the inside of the pond edge where raccoons are entering. (Cut the wire as needed to match the curvature of the pond.) Raccoons will have difficulty reaching over the wire, and will tend to not stand on it because of its instability. To camouflage and extend the life of the wire, spray it with dark-colored automobile undercoat paint or other rustproof paint.

Ponds with steep, 2-foot high side walls discourage raccoons from entering the water, but may be a safety hazard for small children and the elderly. These hazardous areas can be located away from paths and/or be heavily buffered with dense growths of tall marginal plants and shrubs.

Two electrified wires, 6 and 12 inches above ground and just back from the water's edge will deter raccoons



**Figure 6.** *Install two electrified wires, 12 and 18 inches above ground and onto existing fence posts, poultry pen supports, and other structures, using the proper insulators. A single strand of wire may be sufficient, but two wires will provide added insurance against the animal making the climb. Run one or two electrified wires toward the top of the fence to prevent bobcats and other species from jumping the lower hot wires and making the climb. (Drawing by Jenifer Rees.)*



**Figure 7.** *A raccoon guard can be secured around trees, pipes, posts, and other structures to keep raccoons from climbing. It can be made from a piece of aluminum flashing or sheet metal, held together with wire, nails, or screws, and painted to blend in. (Drawing by Jenifer Rees.)*

(see “Preventing Conflicts” in the handout on Great Blue Herons for examples). A single strand of wire may be sufficient, but two wires will provide added insurance against the animal making the climb. The wires can be hooked up to a switch for discretionary use; when you want to work near the wire, turn the system off. Where the barrier presents a safety problem, attach signs, short pieces of white cloth, or other material on the wire for visibility.

**Prevent damage to lawns.** Because worms and grubs inhabit areas just under well-watered sod, raccoons (and skunks) are attracted to these food sources. See “Prevent Damage to Lawns” in the handout on Skunks for ways to prevent conflicts.

## Trapping Raccoons

Trapping and relocating a raccoon several miles away seems an appealing method of resolving a conflict because it is perceived as giving the “problem animal” a second chance in a new home. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is quite different. Raccoons typically try to return to their original territories, often getting hit by a car or killed by a predator in the process. If they remain in the new area, they may get into fights (oftentimes to the death) with resident raccoons for limited food, shelter, or nesting sites. Raccoons may also transmit diseases to rural populations that they have picked up from urban pets. Finally, if a place “in the wild” or an urban green space is perfect for raccoons, raccoons are probably already there. It isn’t fair to the animals already living there to release another competitor into their home range.

Raccoons used to a particular food source, type of shelter, or human activity will seek out familiar situations and surroundings. People, organizations, or agencies that illegally move raccoons should be willing to assume liability for any damages or injuries caused by these animals. Precisely for these reasons, raccoons posing a threat to human and pet safety should not be relocated.

In many cases, moving raccoons will not solve the original problem because other raccoons will replace them and cause similar conflicts. Hence, it is more effective to make the site less attractive to raccoons than it is to routinely trap them.

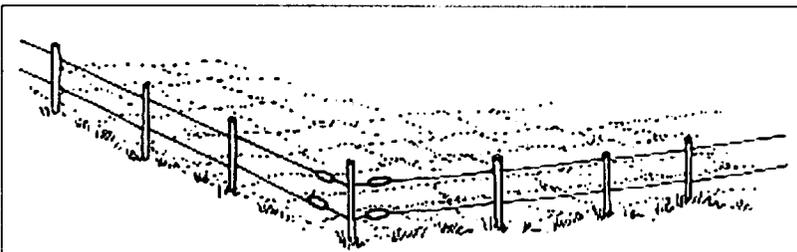
Trapping also may not be legal in some urban areas; check with local authorities. Transporting animals without the proper permit is also unlawful in most cases (see “Legal Status”). See the handout on “Trapping Wildlife” for information on trapping raccoons.

## Lethal Control

Lethal control is a last resort and can never be justified without first applying the above-described nonlethal control techniques. Lethal control is rarely a long-term solution since other raccoons are likely to move in if food, water, or shelter remains available.

If all efforts to dissuade a problem raccoon fail, the animal may have to be trapped.

While shooting can be effective in eliminating a single raccoon, it is generally limited to rural situations. Shooting is considered too hazardous in more populated areas, even if legal.



**Figure 8.** *Install two electrified wires, 6 and 12 inches above ground around field crops and other areas needing protection. The fence can be hooked up to a switch for discretionary use; when you want to work near it, turn the system off. Where the fence presents a safety problem, install signs, short pieces of white cloth, or other material on the wire for visibility.*

*(Drawing by Jenifer Rees.)*

## Public Health Concerns

A disease that contributes significantly to raccoon mortality is **canine distemper**. Canine distemper is also a common disease fatal to domestic dogs, foxes, coyotes, mink, otters, weasels, and skunks. It is caused by a virus and is spread most often when animals come in contact with the bodily secretions of animals infected with the disease. Gloves, cages, and other objects that have come in contact with infected animals can also contain the virus. The best prevention against canine distemper is to have your dogs vaccinated and kept away from raccoons.

Raccoons in Washington often have **roundworms** (like domestic dogs and cats do, but from a different worm). Raccoon roundworm does not usually cause a serious problem for raccoons. However, roundworm eggs shed in raccoon droppings can cause mild to serious illness in other animals and humans. Although rarely documented anywhere in the United States, raccoon roundworm can infect a person who accidentally ingests or inhales the parasite's eggs.

Prevention consists of never touching or inhaling raccoon droppings, using rubber gloves and a mask when cleaning areas (including traps) that have been occupied by raccoons, and keeping young children and pets away from areas where raccoons concentrate. (If washing raccoon droppings from a roof, watch where the liquid matter is going.) Routinely encourage or assist your children to wash their hands after playing outdoors. Unfortunately, raccoon roundworm eggs can remain alive in soil and other places for several months.

If a person is bitten or scratched by a raccoon, immediately scrub the wound with soap and water. Flush the wound liberally with tap water. In other parts of the United States raccoons can carry rabies. Contact your physician and the local health department immediately. If your pet is bitten, follow the same cleansing procedure and contact your veterinarian.

## Legal Status

Because legal status, trapping restrictions, and other information about raccoons change, contact your local wildlife office for updates.

The raccoon is classified as both a furbearer and a game animal (WAC 232-12-007). A hunting or trapping license is required to hunt or trap raccoons during an open season. A property owner or the owner's immediate family, employee, or tenant may kill or trap a raccoon on that property if it is damaging crops or domestic animals (RCW 77.36.030). In such cases, no permit is necessary for the use of live (cage) traps. However, a special trapping permit is required for the use of all traps other than live traps (RCW 77.15.192, 77.15.194; WAC 232-12-142).

It is unlawful to release wildlife anywhere within the state, other than on the property where it was legally trapped, without a permit to do so (RCW 77.15.250; WAC 232-12-271). Except for bona fide public or private zoological parks, persons and entities are prohibited from importing raccoons into Washington State without a permit to do so (WAC 246-100-191).

## Additional Information

### Books

Conover, Michael. *Resolving Human[-]Wildlife Conflicts: The Science of Wildlife Damage Management*. Boca Raton, FL: Lewis Publishers, 2002.

Hynstrom, Scott E., et al. *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1994. (Available from: University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, 202 Natural Resources Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0819; phone: 402-472-2188; also see Internet Sites below.)

Link, Russell. *Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle: University of Washington Press and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1999.

Maser, Chris. *Mammals of the Pacific Northwest: From the Coast to the High Cascades*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998.

Verts, B. J., and Leslie N. Carraway. *Land Mammals of Oregon*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

## Internet Resources

Burke Museum's Mammals of Washington:  
<http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/>

Internet IPM Resources on Vertebrate Pests (Oregon State University):  
<http://www.ippc.orst.edu/cicp/Pests/vertebrate.htm>

Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage:  
<http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu/>

The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management:  
<http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu/>

Tomahawk Live Traps:  
<http://www.livetraps.com/>

U.S. Forest Service Wildlife Species Life Form Information:  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/wildlife/>

Wildlife Control Supplies:  
[http://www.wildlifecontrolsupplies.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=SFNT&Store\\_Code=NWS001](http://www.wildlifecontrolsupplies.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=SFNT&Store_Code=NWS001)

Adapted from "Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest" (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>)

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**Raccoons and Rabies: Very Little in California!**  
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The California Department of Public Health tracks rabies cases by county in our state. Raccoons accounted for FIVE of the approximately 2800 cases of rabies reported in California in the past 10 years. The sole raccoon case in the Bay Area occurred in Novato last year as a result of a rabid bat biting the raccoon. Bats, skunks, fox, and domestic animals each account for more cases of rabies than raccoons.

Thankfully, there is very little raccoon rabies in the Western United States. The Surveillance Data from the Centers for Disease Control indicate the East Coast of the United States is the [area](#) of main concern for raccoon rabies. That being said, any mammal can get rabies, and [prevention](#) is key to protecting ourselves.

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Rabies is usually passed to humans via the bite of a rabid animal. Occasionally it can be transmitted if the saliva of an infected animal gets into a fresh scratch, break in the skin, or contact with mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, nose).

Never touch or approach a wild raccoon, and always wear gloves if you must handle any wild animal, even if it is dead. Use a shovel or cardboard to move dead animals. Be careful with all animals, as they can harbor diseases and parasites other than rabies.

If you see a raccoon that looks sick, (runny eyes and nose, dragging legs, weak, seeming "tame,") call our hotline at 510/421-9897, your local Animal Care & Control Department or Vector Control for advice. Note: canine distemper, a virus common to raccoons, that is NOT transmissible to humans, can have similar symptoms to rabies.

Enjoy wild animals from a distance. Do not handle, feed, or attract them. Place trash in secure garbage cans.

Never adopt or bring wild animals into your home. Teach your children not to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. Keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for all cats and dogs.

Prevent bats from entering areas where they might come in contact with people or pets. Check out the CDC and Bat Conservation International websites for further information about bats and rabies.

Sources: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/rabies.aspx>,  
[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub\\_rabies.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_rabies.htm), [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

## **A Better Solution to Trapping and Relocating**

Dear Rancho Raccoon: I recently trapped a pesky raccoon who has been using the cat door. I dropped it off in a nice park, with trees and a lake. Now I find out this is illegal. What's the problem? The common idea that removing one or a few animals will resolve a wildlife issue is a myth. Removing one particular animal that is causing a problem simply makes room for another animal to continue the behavior. The effective solution is to remove the attractant, or the method of entry. Pet food, pet doors, new grass, ponds, open windows, uncapped chimneys, all invite wildlife to come on in and share the wealth!

California Fish and Game Code (CCR 679) states that trapped wildlife may not be relocated. Trapped wildlife must be killed or released in the immediate area - defined in CDFG policy as the property on which the animal was trapped.

Moving wildlife from one location to another is not as humane as you might believe. Much of our local wildlife lives in family groups for a large part of the year, and has dependent juveniles into the fall and winter. It can be fatal to remove a wild animal from its territory into another. Wildlife is very jealous of the resources in their territories, and do not welcome new members. In their home territories, most animals have enough knowledge of the area and of the other animals in it to avoid difficult situations if they want to. Not so in an entirely new territory.

Finally, removing an animal who is bothering you is usually not a long-term solution to the problem. Wildlife is attracted to properties for food or nesting purposes. If you remove the food attractant, and close off the opportunities to nest in structures, your wildlife problems will be over.

Please, do not trap and relocate wildlife! Call our hotline at 510/421-9897 for advice on dealing with wildlife conflicts, or email [megan@Ranchoraccoon.org](mailto:megan@Ranchoraccoon.org).

## **How to Solve Raccoon/Human Conflicts**

10 Ways to Prevent Wildlife Problems:

1. Don't leave pet food outside.
2. Don't leave bird seed in feeders or on the ground overnight.
3. Don't put unsecured garbage outside at night.
4. Close and lock pet doors at night.
5. Trim overhanging branches that provide easy access to your roof for squirrels, raccoons and rats.
6. Cap your chimney.
7. Inspect roof, eaves and siding for damage.
8. Make sure vent covers are not broken or missing.
9. Install L-shaped wire barriers to prevent animals from digging under decks.
10. Share this information with your neighbors!

## **Raccoon Myths and Facts**

### **If you see a raccoon out in the daytime, it is probably rabid. MYTH!**

Here in California there is little raccoon rabies. Most cases of raccoon rabies are found in the Eastern half of the United States. While any mammal can contract rabies, usually through bat bites, raccoons are not among the animals likeliest to get or spread rabies in California. There have only been three reported cases of raccoon rabies in the state of California in the last 10 years. Rabies vector species here are bats, skunks and fox.

If you see a raccoon out in the daytime, it is either hungry (much like humans, raccoons occasionally arise from sleep for a snack), injured or ill, or has been disturbed from its sleeping site.

As with all wild animals, don't approach it, but there is no need to panic. If it appears sick or injured, call your local Humane Society or wildlife rehabilitation center. For more information on what to do if you find an injured wild animal, click [HERE](#).

### **Raccoons are cat-killers. MYTH!**

It would be foolish to state that a raccoon would never kill a cat, and it has happened on occasion. However, raccoons and cats generally co-exist in peace, usually ignoring each other completely. Cats often hiss and growl at raccoons, and raccoons usually back off. Of course, when food is involved raccoons spring into action, and will always reach an arm past even a hissing cat to get into the food bowl. To avoid cat/raccoon conflict and fighting, do not feed animals outdoors, and keep cats in at night.

I have seen many a cat attack a raccoon attempting to sneak into a house, and every time the raccoon has skulked away looking embarrassed. My female cat, Missy, used to find raccoons had entered my house at night through an open deck door, and chase them through the entire flat and out the back deck where they scrambled down the

deck posts as fast as they could. Missy died of heart failure at a natural cat age, secure in the knowledge that no raccoon had ever made it past her vigilant guard.

It's always a good idea to keep all pets inside and lock cat doors at night to protect your pet and avoid unwanted houseguests. If you must leave a cat door open at night for your cat, be sure to pick up any cat food left out in the evening so that raccoons, skunks, and other night-time visitors will not find a lovely midnight buffet awaiting them. Never leave food outside for animals, as that is an open invitation to all local wildlife to join the feed!

### Raccoons are exceptionally loyal. FACT!



Raccoons stick together in tight mother and offspring groups for most of the babies' first year. The mother and siblings will not leave a family member who is caught in a trap, stuck up a tree or otherwise unable to go with them for some time, and try everything they can to free their family member.

Over and over I've seen young orphan raccoons learning to climb large trees, become frightened and cling to high branches crying as their siblings descend. Invariably one or more siblings scurry all the way back up the tree and surround the frightened one, chittering, nosing and sometimes butting it gently to encourage it down the tree.

A mother raccoon who gets locked out of a den site in a home will claw and bite at the blocked entrance for hours, sometimes for several nights, to get to her babies. If a baby is found in a home where the mother has been locked out, it can usually be reunited with its mother for the next couple of nights by placing the baby in a box outside the entrance the raccoon has been using, and placing a towel the baby has been sleeping in just outside the box for the mother to smell. When attempting to reunite a mother and baby, it is most important that someone stays to watch and ensure the baby isn't taken by a predator (human or wild), and that the baby is warm and safe while the attempt to reunite occurs. For more advice on reuniting mothers and babies, call Rancho Raccoon or your local wildlife rehabilitation center.

### Raccoons must wash their food because they produce no saliva. MYTH!



Raccoons love water, and will almost always put their hands into water if it's available. The nerves in raccoon hands, which are as sensitive as those in human hands, become even more sensitive when wet. When raccoons put food in water, it isn't to clean it, or because they need the moisture, but to feel it with their wet paws.

Raccoons are great fishermen as well, and crayfish are among their favorite foods, along with crabs and other shellfish.

### Raccoons can eat almost anything. FACT!

Raccoons are among the most omnivorous and adaptable of animals. They're able to digest and use all kinds of foods from grasses to vegetables to acorns, bark, rodents, shellfish, fish, frogs, legumes, birds, eggs and most of all, delicious insects! That's why we seldom see thin raccoons unless they are ill or orphaned.

Raccoons are opportunistic feeders, in fact raccoons in general embody the ideal of opportunism. Therefore it's important to keep pet food and our human food and garbage out of reach of raccoons (and other wildlife) to avoid wildlife/human conflicts. While feeding wildlife is a lot of fun for humans, because we get to see them up close, it is not good practice for the animals.

Once they become used to getting food from humans they don't know that they should not:

- be greedy (greed is a positive for wild animals),
- break in when no food is put out,
- have loud, occasionally bloody, fights over food,
- make their nests in the crawlspace, and
- invite all their friends

**Raccoons make good pets. MYTH!**



Raccoons are highly intelligent, independent, instinctive, adaptable, determined and above all, wild. Once they're past the baby stage, they become more solitary than when young, and if given the choice, will go off to live their own

lives.

If they are forced to be pets, they are moody and destructive of property. Even the sweetest "pet" raccoon cannot be trusted not to bite its caretakers or other humans. Biting is a fact of life among wild animals, and is perfectly natural. It is not an attractive attribute in a house pet. Please do yourself and raccoons a favor, and don't try to keep them as pets.

Like all wild animals, raccoons should be allowed to live their natural wild lives and not be forced into domestic arrangements they would never choose for themselves.

It is illegal to keep raccoons or any other wildlife as pets in California.

**Raccoon roundworm can be passed to humans. FACT!**

Raccoons harbor a parasite called Baylis ascaris procyonis, or raccoon roundworm. The parasite is passed to humans ONLY through ingestion of raccoon feces that contain the eggs (it is not passed through the air). It can cause eye and central nervous system problems in humans and animals other than raccoons.

It is most dangerous to small children or people with weak immune systems. There have been cases of small children eating raccoon feces found outdoors and ingesting the eggs. Raccoons generally have latrine areas outdoors, and contracting the parasite can be avoided easily by watching small children outdoors and careful hand-washing.

Those who work around raccoon feces, like wildlife rehabilitators, take extra precautions to avoid the parasite, such as wearing masks when cleaning raccoon pens and giving foster care raccoons a wormer while they are in care.

Moral: Don't eat raccoon poop!

**Raccoons' hind feet that can turn backwards to climb down trees head first. FACT!**

Raccoons are able to climb head first down trees because their hind feet naturally turn 180 degrees to allow them to cling with their claws.

Baby raccoons don't realize this at first, and will climb down trees backwards, peering nervously down over their shoulders (and past their fat tummies). Their first few forays headfirst down a tree trunk are a nervous thrill for them! After a little while, they can be seen zipping headfirst down smooth-trunked trees, only using their hind feet to help steer and "brake."

**Raccoons aren't harmed by cat or dog diseases. MYTH.**

Raccoons can get many of the same parasites and viruses that domestic pets get. Two of the most common killers of raccoons are feline panleukopenia (feline distemper or parvo), and canine distemper. These diseases are passed among many kinds of wildlife, and occur from time to time in most areas. Canine distemper in raccoons is often mistaken for rabies, because it can have similar neurological symptoms in its late stages.

Humans should always protect both pets and wildlife by ensuring domestic animals' vaccinations are up-to-date.

**Raccoons do nothing helpful for humans, just eat up our garbage and nest in our houses! MYTH!**



While it's true that raccoons can be rather pesky neighbors, until we learn to keep them out of our garbage cans (2 bungee cords crossed on any garbage can lid will keep the masked banditos out) and from under our homes (close up entrances when you know the raccoons are gone), very few people know that they delight in eating up every yellowjacket they get between their jaws! Yes, they do get stung, but the swelling only lasts an hour or two, and they don't seem to mind when the reward is another delicious insect meal.

**They are also good little rodent-frighteners, and will eat rats and mice whenever they can catch them.**