



**Animal and Plant Health  
Inspection Service**

**Wildlife Services**

**Factsheet**

August 2016

**Living with Wildlife**



Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve conflicts between people and wildlife, to create a balance that allows coexistence and reduces wildlife damage. In many cases, we accomplish this by providing information and tools so people can solve their own wildlife-related problems.

Wild animals are an important part of nature and a source of outdoor enjoyment, but they can also damage property, agriculture, and natural resources and threaten human health and safety. 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. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service at [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

Techniques to manage wildlife conflicts can involve simple actions such as trimming trees and shrubs or limiting food sources by securing garbage. More specific information is below, but for further details or direct help, contact your State's Wildlife Services office by calling 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

**Squirrels and Other Rodents**

To keep these animals from becoming a permanent part of your home and yard, you can screen louvers, vents, and fan openings; keep doors and windows in good repair; tighten eaves; replace rotten boards; cap the chimneys; trim overhanging trees; remove bird feeders or use squirrel-proof feeders; and remove acorns and other nuts from the yard. Because landscaping features such as ground cover, trees, and shrubs can provide protection for chipmunks trying to get into your home, do not plant the features in a way that connects wooded areas with your home's foundations.

*Scare devices, repellents, 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, eat 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 electrical fencing wire placed 4 to 5 inches off the ground.

## Opossums and Skunks

Opossums and skunks become problematic when they raid garbage cans and bird feeders, eat pet food, and live under porches or anywhere that offers shelter close to a home. Skunks also dig in lawns, golf courses, and gardens. Both animals sometimes kill poultry and eat their 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. You can prevent this by sealing entry and exit holes (after the bats leave) with such materials as one-fourth inch mesh hardware cloth or caulking. If a bat makes its way into the house, it will usually leave after dark if you turn on lights and open 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; feeding on agricultural crops; accumulation of droppings and feathers; attacks on people by aggressive birds; and the fouling of water, lawns, and recreational areas. When people feed waterfowl at



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

public parks and other areas, it may worsen these issues and cause further conflicts. [Wildlife Services' factsheet on waterfowl](#) offers information on numerous techniques to address these problems.

## Rabbits

You can help keep rabbits away from gardens, ornamental plants, and small trees by using products with repellents or by placing a 2-foot-high poultry fence around the area. The fence must be buried at least 6 inches beneath the ground surface. Local garden and farm supply centers may be a source for repellents. Taste repellents are usually more effective than odor repellents. The degree of success, however, is highly variable, depending on the behavior and number of rabbits, and alternative foods available. Before using any chemical repellents, read the label carefully and check with your State pesticide regulatory agency for application guidelines.

## Raccoons

Garden produce, garbage, and pet food are all easy food sources that attract raccoons. 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

**To prevent problems, you can modify habitat and avoid feeding wildlife, either intentionally or accidentally.**

strands of electric livestock fence placed 4 and 8 inches, respectively, off the ground, surrounding the entire garden. An electric fence has currents running through it that will shock anything that touches it. It should be used with care. To prevent injury, follow all of the manufacturer's safety instructions, keep children and pets away from the fence, and post warning signs. Raccoons will also readily dwell in 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 a house is to seal cracks and openings around doors, windows, water pipes, attics, and foundations. You can make your yard less attractive to snakes by removing logs, woodpiles, and high grass and controlling insects and rodents. To remove dangerous snakes, always call a professional pest control company. You can remove nonpoisonous snakes from inside buildings by placing piles of damp burlap bags or towels in areas where snakes have been seen. After the bags or towels have been out for a couple of weeks, completely remove them with a large scoop shovel during the middle of the day when snakes are likely to be inside or underneath.



*Foxes often den close to farm buildings or animal enclosures.*

## 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 and Mylar strips.

## Deer

Deer feed on row crops, vegetables, fruit trees, nursery stock, stacked hay, ornamental plants, and trees. You can discourage these animals by selecting garden plants they don't eat, removing supplemental food sources, and 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

It is vital to protect livestock and poultry 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. Noise- and light-making devices and guarding dogs may also help prevent predation on sheep. Regrettably, dispersal methods are not effective in all situations, so other methods, including trapping or snaring, may be necessary. 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](#).

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

## Mountain Lions and Bears

As bear and lion populations increase and their habitats continue to decrease, interactions between these animals and people become more frequent. 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; removing brush and trees within a quarter of a mile around buildings and livestock may reduce lion predation. Professional relocation of damaging mountain lions and bears is sometimes necessary. Your State wildlife agency can advise on laws and regulations in your area for relocation or lethal control of mountain lions and bears.

### Learn More

For more information about solving these and other wildlife problems, call the Wildlife Services office in your State at 1-866-4USDA-WS or contact our staff at (301) 851-4009.

You can learn more about Wildlife Services' work by visiting our Web site at [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage).



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