

Avoiding Conflicts with Wildlife in the City

As the City of Denver continues to grow impacting wildlife habitat, it often times displaces and affects the natural order of wild animals. Some species continue to live in open-space areas, parks, undeveloped parcels of land, river bottoms, and on or near bodies of water. Others have adapted quite well to urban living; skunks, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, foxes, coyotes and geese, in particular, seem to thrive in and near the city.

An ounce of prevention to avoiding conflicts with wildlife goes a long way. The key to avoiding problem wildlife encounters is keeping unwanted wildlife out of homes, buildings and yards, and making them feel unwelcome. Here are some tips:

- Do Not Feed Wildlife! Even the feeding of songbirds may attract other unwanted wildlife on to your property. Wild animals are capable of finding plenty of natural food on their own.
- Cover window wells with commercially available grates or covers.
- Close holes around and under the foundation of your home so that animals will not be tempted to homestead. Bury wire mesh 1 to 2 feet deep in places where animals might gain access.
- Don't give wildlife the opportunity to get into your garbage. Store garbage in metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep the containers in a garage or shed, and only put out on your scheduled pickup day.
- Keep pet food inside - Cover up doggie doors at night.
- Mark windows with strips of white tape if birds are flying in to windows.
- Fence gardens and cover fruit trees with netting to protect your harvest.
- Screen fireplace chimneys and furnace, attic and dryer vents and keep dampers closed to avoid "drop-in" guests. Screen chimney tops from February to September to prevent birds and animals from nesting inside.
- Seal all cracks and holes larger than one-quarter inch in diameter to keep out rats, mice, bats and snakes.

BATS



- Exclusion is the best policy in preventing bats from gaining access to your property. Bats can fit through the smallest of areas, so do your best to caulk cracks, and weatherstrip spaces around doors and windows. Seal all entrances of your home. Never handle a bat that appears sick or wounded.
 - Bats can be helpful in your neighborhood because they consume a lot of insects and usually do not pose a health threat to humans.
 - If ever in contact with a bat, call your local health department or state wildlife agency.

GEESE



Canada geese are attracted to areas with open water and large expanses of grass, such as golf courses, parks, cemeteries, and large apartment complexes. The conflicts seem most noticeable during winter when large numbers of migrating geese join year-round resident geese.

- Never feed geese! Feeding is the number one problem for concentrations of geese in urban populated areas. Feeding compounds the over-population problem and invites disease. It is illegal to feed geese and other wildlife on Denver Park properties.
- Eliminate some of the large expanses of lawn by planting shrubs and other visual barriers. Geese do not like obstructed views, so the more vegetation the better, for discouraging geese from a particular area.
- Make geese feel uncomfortable. If they're hanging out in your yard, try noise-making tactics during the fall and winter to discourage them from staying on your property. Also, remove old nests during this time of year to stop geese from returning in the spring.

RACCOONS



- Screen chimneys and repair attic holes to prevent entry.
- Remove overhanging branches to cut off easy access to your roof or other parts of your property.

- Do not leave trash can containers out, and cover them with tight-fitting lids or clasp lids tightly to avoid them from opening if raccoons or other wildlife tip them over.
- If raccoons do end up in your chimney, you can either call a private Pest Control Agency for a fee to remove them, or wait for them to leave on their own, or try placing ammonia soaked rags as far up the chute as you can, and shine some lights up the chimney to encourage the raccoons to leave.
- NEVER Feed Raccoons!

SNAKES



Rattlesnake



Bullsnake

In Colorado, nearly all species of snakes are not only harmless but beneficial to humans and the environment because of their appetites for insects and rodents. Along the Front Range, however, prairie rattlesnakes can create conflicts by showing up in unwanted places. Rattlesnakes have elliptical pupils, distinctive heat-sensing pits on each side of their face and rattles on their tail. Some people get them confused with bullsnakes which also rattle their tails. Bullsnakes and garter snakes are quite common in Colorado and the more common ones you will see.

If you live where prairie rattlesnakes are found or if you have an aversion to snakes, some simple habitat modifications around your property will usually solve the problem.

- Get rid of stacked wood piles and other piles of debris. Keep firewood in a covered box.
- Do not landscape with expanses of large rocks, especially in open sunny areas.
- Mow weeds and vegetation and remove rocks, boards and debris.
- Reduce the rodent population on your property to reduce a major food source for snakes.
- Seal entrances to crawl spaces and basements.

If you encounter a prairie or massasauga rattlesnake (the only poisonous snake in Colorado), simply back away. Snakes sense your presence by your body heat and movement. In Colorado, rattlesnakes may be legally killed if they pose a threat. All other snakes are classified as nongame wildlife and are protected by law.

SKUNKS



In Colorado, skunks cannot be relocated or removed from your own property. If you decide to trap a skunk, you must destroy the animal on site, because state health laws and wildlife laws do not permit relocation of skunks.

- Keep skunks out of house foundations and basements by burying wire mesh at least 18 inches underground around these structures or by using concrete or sheet metal to seal likely access points.
- Sometimes skunks can be driven away by putting ammonia-soaked towels under the house (be sure to attach a long string so you can remove them later) or in areas where skunks are trying to burrow.
- Cover the ground at the entrance with soft soil or flour so you can see tracks leaving the entrance. This gives you an opportunity to close the entrance and permanently seal it.

Caution: Don't use this method if children use this area.

SQUIRRELS



- Do not feed squirrels. If you have to put out bird feeders, place them on a tall pipe or post that squirrels cannot climb or reach.
- Screen attic vents on the inside with hardware cloth to keep squirrels out. Trim branches hanging over buildings.
- If a squirrel is loose in the house, block off the room it's in, provide one-way out (by opening a window or door) and watch until you see the squirrel leave.
- If you have a squirrel in a fireplace, close the damper immediately. Then open the doors or screen slightly and use a hand-held fishing net to capture the squirrel. Cover the net opening with a board and take the animal outside for release.
- Prevent squirrels from climbing trees by placing 18-inch metal cylinders on tree trunks.

WOODPECKERS



Northern Flicker



Hairy Woodpecker

In Colorado, the common Northern flicker is the most abundant woodpecker species. It can be found drumming on wood siding, eaves and shingles of homes. These birds are territorial; drumming marks their territories and attracts mates. Woodpeckers also drill holes for nesting and roosting.

Woodpeckers are protected by law. There are a number of different techniques you can use to discourage their activities.

- Provide an alternative drumming site. Nail two boards together at just one end (Producing resonation) and hang on a secure surface.
- Place lightweight plastic mesh netting at least 3 inches from affected wood areas.
- Nail plywood over the excavated area.
- Hang aluminum foil strips, colored plastic streamers, hawk silhouettes or mirrors near the affected wood.
- Use noise-making tactics - such as clapping your hands.
- Spray the birds gently with a water hose when they start to drill or drum.
- Eliminate any ledges or cracks on which the woodpecker is able to stand while drumming.
- Do Not feed birds.

If woodpeckers continue to be a problem, you can apply for a special permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Federal Wildlife Agency), which allows you to destroy the birds.

RABBITS



Cottontails are found throughout North, Central and South America and have adapted to a variety of habitats. Open spaces, and the abundance of groomed city lawns and residential yards have provided great food and shelter for them.

Rabbits commonly browse in parks, neighborhood lawns and flower and vegetable gardens. They can nest near high use areas, and nests are often damaged or destroyed when mowed over or walked on. There are fewer predators in urban environments and populations can get large. Rabbit activity is more noticeable during winter when they

begin to eat twigs and buds off low shrubs. Look for neatly snapped branch ends less than two feet off the ground.

Protect your gardens and areas around your house:

Rabbit proof fencing is the best method to keep rabbits out of your garden. Dig a 6-8 inch trench around garden - place chicken wire in trench - and cover with soil.

- Rabbit holes around your deck or porch area: When rabbits have vacated the hole, fill in with packed dirt, and seal permanently with cement.
- To discourage rabbits from digging holes in your yard, place ammonia soaked rags in the areas where they are frequenting (i.e., around porch, deck, flower beds, dirt holes, etc.).
- NEVER feed rabbits!

LEAVE WILDLIFE ALONE

During this time of year, spring and summer, people often encounter young animals in urban areas, the mountains and the plains. In all cases, the rule of thumb is: LEAVE THEM ALONE! Larger mammals such as elk and deer often leave their young while feeding, relying on the young animals' natural camouflage to protect them. Don't assume that just because you don't see the parents, the young have been abandoned. This goes for other urban wildlife species as well.

In cases where newly hatched birds have fallen from their nest, return them to the nest if you can do so safely. Or, place them on a high branch or platform to keep them away from pets and other people. It is not uncommon to find young birds on the ground for long periods of time, seeming as if they can't fly. When young birds are beginning to fly, their time on the ground can be long as they perfect their flying skills. If this appears to be the case, leave them alone and let them learn. It's always best to let nature take its course. If you are absolutely certain that wildlife is abandoned or injured, call Colorado Parks and Wildlife at 303-291-7227.

WILDLIFE LAWS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Wild animals are fascinating creatures to observe. While they are intriguing to some and hopelessly cute to others, they do not make good pets, and they are difficult to keep alive in captivity, which are reasons why it is ILLEGAL in Colorado to possess wildlife. Despite the fact that wildlife is best left alone, there are instances when people pick up injured or orphaned wildlife. If this does occur, please call Colorado Parks and Wildlife. It is illegal to attempt to rehabilitate injured or orphaned wildlife without state and federal permits. CPW can put you in touch with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area.

HELPFUL NUMBERS

If you have a wildlife problem in the City and County of Denver, call the city's Wildlife Hotline at 720-913-0630, or Colorado Parks & Wildlife during regular business hours at 303-291-7227.

For emergencies after hours or on weekends, call 3-1-1, or Colorado State Patrol at 303-239-4501, or your local law enforcement agency.

Pest Control agencies that specialize in wildlife can assist with many problems for a fee. Look in the phone directory under pest control to find a company that can help you.

REMEMBER - We live in a natural resource rich state that supports a variety of wildlife species. Enjoy them from a distance and give them their space and the respect they deserve.



*Denver Parks & Recreation
Natural Resources Operations
Office of the City Naturalist*

Wildlife Hotline: 720-913-0630