



Raccoons

*Conflicts with raccoons come in many shapes and sizes,
but all can be resolved humanely.*

RELEVANT NATURAL HISTORY

Raccoons are intelligent and highly adaptable mammals. They are primarily nocturnal, but they may be active during the day, especially when caring for their young. Suburban and urban landscapes suit them perfectly. Chimneys and attics provide great denning sites; pet food and trash left outside provide a free buffet. They adapt easily to our lifestyles, yet people often have wrong ideas about raccoons—for example, that a raccoon seen during the day must have rabies. Raccoons are very beneficial animals; they provide free pest control by eating things some people don't like, such as bugs, grubs, small snakes, mice and even baby rats. People also wrongly assume that raccoons are vicious animals, not realizing that healthy raccoons don't take on opponents much bigger than a mouse. Of course, like any animal, they'll try to defend themselves if cornered.

WHAT TO TELL CALLERS

RACCOON IN THE GARBAGE

ADVICE: Uncovered trash cans provide an open invitation to hungry

raccoons. Trash must be well-contained to stop garbage raids. Callers can secure trash lids with bungee cords, get an Animal Stopper brand trash can (equipped with a built-in bungee cords), put the garbage out the morning of trash pickup or get an outdoor storage enclosure for trash cans from a home-building store. Trapping won't solve the problem; as long as there's a food source, the raccoon will return to it.

RACCOON IN DUMPSTER

ADVICE: The raccoon smelled good things and jumped into the dumpster, but now she's stuck because she can't climb the slippery sides of the dumpster to get out! Tell the caller to provide an exit route: Put a strong branch (2 inches in diameter or larger) or plank-like piece of wood in the dumpster at a 45-degree angle so the raccoon can climb out. Emphasize that the branch must run from top to bottom and be thick enough to support her weight. Assure the caller that the raccoon won't jump out and bite them; she will huddle nervously in the corner. If public dumpster lids are left open all the time, encourage the caller to post a big sign advising people to keep the lid closed so animals don't keep getting trapped inside.

RACCOON SEEN IN DAYTIME

ADVICE: This is not necessarily cause for alarm. Raccoons are active by day when people leave out pet food or when the raccoons have hungry young to feed.

ACTIONABLE: Assess whether the raccoon is acting strangely—is she circling, dragging herself or acting injured, lethargic, unresponsive or unusually aggressive? If yes, dispatch an officer for assistance.

RACCOON DISORIENTED, FALLING DOWN, CIRCLING OR SHOWING UNPROVOKED AGGRESSION

ACTIONABLE: Dispatch an officer to handle the situation.

RACCOON EATING PET FOOD

ADVICE: It's no wonder raccoons are responding to the free buffet. Who wouldn't? The best solution is to feed pets indoors. If pets must be fed outside, the caller should be advised to feed them only at a certain time in the morning or midday, then quickly take away any uneaten food. Pets will get used to the new schedule and modify their behavior accordingly. Trapping the raccoon won't help. Other wild animals will be attracted to the pet food, and baby raccoons will be left behind to starve if their mother is trapped.

RACCOON IN BIRD FEEDER

ADVICE: There are effective squirrel baffles that also work to keep raccoons out. A good one is shaped like a stovepipe and placed on the pole portion of the bird feeder. It allows the raccoon to climb up the pole and into the closed pipe, but prevents her from going further. The pipe must be at least 24 inches long to prevent the raccoon from climbing over it and set at least 4 feet off the ground (up to the bottom part of the baffle) to keep her from jumping over it.

RACCOON IN GARAGE

ADVICE: If a raccoon wandered in through an open door, remove access to food, birdseed bags or trash. Open the garage door before dusk, sprinkle an 8-inch band of white flour under it and watch for exiting footprints. Close the door once the raccoon is gone.

If this problem occurs in spring or summer, and the garage door has been open for a longer period, it is most likely a mother with babies. She is likely to be in the rafters or on a high shelf with her cubs, and you don't want to separate her from her babies. In this case:

SELF-HELP OPTIONS: Let them stay until they leave on their own (the kindest and best option) or evict them by placing vinegar-doused rags and a blaring radio in the garage near the den site. It may take the mother a while to find a new den and move her cubs, however. Typically moms will move their young in response to harassment, but she may be resistant to leaving right away. A nuisance wildlife control specialist can be called (for a fee) but it's vital for the caller to emphasize they want the family evicted, not trapped and killed or trapped and relocated. Unfortunately, many nuisance wildlife control businesses routinely kill or relocate wildlife, so we don't recommend this option.

BABY RACCOON FOLLOWING PEOPLE

REFERRAL: Refer to a wildlife rehabilitator. He's likely a hungry orphan who will follow anything that moves, but he could also be sick.

RACCOON COMING THROUGH CAT OR DOG DOOR

ADVICE: The best solution is to feed pets indoors and not use a pet door. However, if the caller must have a pet door, recommend that they purchase a strong, electrically controlled door that only lets your designated pet in through a signal transmitted by her collar. These doors can be found at local pet supply stores.

RACCOON EATING FISH OUT OF POND

ADVICE: It is difficult to have a delicacy like fish in an area and expect raccoons not to notice! The best solution is to maintain a higher water level (at least 3 feet deep) and stack cinder blocks, large rocks or ceramic pipes in the bottom of the pond so the fish can escape from the raccoon and take refuge.

RACCOON DAMAGING LAWN

ADVICE: When it rains heavily or a lawn is over-watered, grubs come to the surface—where raccoons smell them and start digging. Once the lawn dries out—and if homeowners are careful not to over-water—the grubbing should cease. Callers can apply natural products like Grub Away Nematodes (gardensalive.com) or Milky Spore (found in ardening/landscape/home improvement stores) to the lawn to reduce grub numbers; they are very effective if applied properly (i.e., watered into the ground and applied at the right time of year). Callers can also sprinkle cayenne pepper or non-toxic capsaicin-based repellents on localized digging areas for a temporary effect.

RACCOON IN CHICKEN COOP

ADVICE: The only effective way to protect chickens is to reinforce the coop so raccoons can't get in. Explain that chickens, eggs and supplemental feed like corn (which attracts rodents) will continually attract wildlife, so it's important to boost their coop's security. Any part of the structure not enclosed by wood—including window openings and doors—should be covered or reinforced with wildlife-proof mesh. Chicken wire alone is not wildlife-proof. Instead, use 16-gauge 1-inch-by-1-inch galvanized welded wire to prevent raccoons from reaching through or breaking the wire mesh. Although it's an inconvenience, once an animal enclosure is reinforced and maintained, the problem is permanently solved.

RACCOON UNDER DECK

ADVICE: If it's spring or summer, it's likely to be a mother with her young. Raccoons move to multiple den sites within their home range for many reasons. The family may leave on its own, but if tolerance is not possible, harassment can speed up the process. It's also possible to evict the raccoon using a one-way door (which allows animals to exit but not enter) and attach wire mesh in an L-shaped design (to prevent

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digging under the mesh barrier), but it's critical to make sure no animals are entrapped or babies are left behind to starve. Refer the caller to humanesociety.org/raccoons for details on harassing and evicting the raccoons. You can also refer the caller to a humane exclusion specialist, but be sure to emphasize the importance of humanely evicting the animals. There's no need to trap and kill them or trap and remove them, which is what most nuisance wildlife control companies do.

To harass away the raccoon, instruct the caller to:

- Place a radio (set to a talk radio station or loud music with a beat) near the area where the raccoon is staying. This alone is often enough to encourage the mother to move her young.
- Place a motion-triggered sprinkler or compressed air device near the spot the raccoon has been spotted entering. Each time she walks by, she will be sprayed with water or a burst of air.
- Place cider vinegar-soaked rags or a hot pepper-based repellent (like Critter Ridder) near the entrance.

NOTE: Ensure that the caller knows not to use mothballs or ammonia. The chemicals released are harmful to both humans and animals.

RACCOON USING PORCH/PATIO AS A LATRINE

Raccoons defecate in communal sites called latrines. This can be frustrating if they've chosen an area the caller frequently uses, but it can also be a health concern: Raccoons are the primary host of *Baylisascaris procyonis*, a roundworm that can be passed to humans who inadvertently ingest fecal matter laced with eggs. To stop raccoons from using the area as a latrine, the caller must clean the area (wearing gloves). Roundworm eggs in newly deposited feces are not infectious for two to four weeks, but it's a good idea to clean it up as soon as you see it. (Refer them to humanesociety.org/raccoons for instructions.) Next, they should liberally use a repellent like Critter Ridder (granular form). Instruct them to reapply the repellent until the raccoon stops using the area. Other measures include setting up a motion-triggered sprinkler or compressed air device near the area to scare away the raccoon when he goes to defecate in the area.

BABY RACCOONS AROUND DEAD MOTHER

REFERRAL: Refer to a licensed rehabilitator. Tell the caller to put an upside-down laundry basket over the babies so they don't wander off.

RACCOON IN TRAP

ADVICE: Animals in traps are highly stressed and must be released as soon as possible. Explain that trapping raccoons is not advised for many reasons. In spring and summer, babies are often left behind to starve, and trapping never solves the root cause of the problem.

BETTER OPTION: The caller can safely release the raccoon by putting a towel over the trap (for a visual barrier, which will calm both the raccoon and the caller) and opening the door (while wearing heavy gloves). They shouldn't shake the trap. The raccoon will come out on his or her own. If they refuse to let the raccoon out, dispatch an officer or a volunteer so the animal is not left in the trap to suffer and die.

RACCOON IN ATTIC OR CHIMNEY

ADVICE: In spring and summer, mother raccoons take advantage of chimneys and attics to raise cubs. A humane wildlife control company can exclude raccoons professionally, but callers may want to do it themselves.

SELF-HELP OPTIONS: If the caller wants to try evicting the raccoons themselves, know that raccoons want a quiet, dark and non-noxious-smelling place to raise their young. By creating the opposite conditions, raccoons can be encouraged to move on.

- **Evicting chimney-dwelling raccoons:** Keep the damper closed and put a blaring radio (tuned to a rock or rap station) in the fireplace. Then put a bowl of vinegar on a footstool near the damper. Apply these deterrents just before dusk; mother raccoons may not want to move cubs in daylight. Be patient—it may take a few days for the mother to move her young. Once the raccoons are gone, call a chimney sweep to clean the flue and install an NFPA-approved expanded metal chimney cap so the situation doesn't happen again.
- **Evicting attic-dwelling raccoons:** Leave all the lights on and place a blaring radio (tuned to a rock or rap station) and vinegar-doused rags or tennis balls around the attic. Apply these deterrents just before dusk; mother raccoons may not want to move their cubs in daylight. Be patient—it may take a few days. The mother may resist leaving if she doesn't have a suitable alternative den site nearby. Once the raccoons are gone, promptly seal any entry hole so the situation doesn't happen again.

NOTE: It can be hard to verify whether the raccoons are gone. Before sealing any entry hole, stuff it first with newspaper and see if the paper stays in place for three successive nights. Callers can also install a wildlife camera to watch for the animals' departure from the entry point. If they catch the animals leaving, the den has been vacated. After sealing the entry hole with hardware cloth, make sure no raccoons are left behind by leaving a sardine or dog food in the attic and checking whether it is uneaten after 24 hours. Or you can sprinkle flour in front of the entry hole and check for the footprints of a raccoon trying to get out.

WHY NOT SET A TRAP?

ADVICE: Trapping hardly ever solves wildlife problems. In fact, it usually makes matters worse. Even in studies where all the raccoons were trapped out of an area, others from the surrounding area soon moved into the vacated niche. In addition, trapping often leads to starving young being left behind. It's much more effective to remove whatever is attracting the animal (food source, den site) and exclude animals from areas they're not wanted rather than try to continually remove all the animals themselves. (Refer to page 38 to help the caller understand the problems with trapping.)

→ **TO LEARN MORE** about raccoons, go to humanesociety.org/raccoons.