

NWRI ... Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc. ... is a 25+ year old, not-for-profit (501c3) organization whose mission is to *rehabilitate and release orphaned and injured wildlife, and through education, preserve and protect the natural habitat and species indigenous to Nebraska and the Great Plains. The means to accomplish this mission is to educate the public to an understanding of our Great Plains ecosystem and its component parts.*

P.O. Box 24122
Omaha, Nebraska
68124



Living with...

Raccoons



Urban Wildlife Series

PO Box 24122
Omaha, NE 68124-0122
Hotline (402) 341-8619
www.nebraskawildliferehab.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



About Raccoons

Raccoons are found in almost every major habitat in the continental United States and Central America, and have recently expanded their range into southern Canada as well. The raccoon may be as long as three feet from nose to end of tail. Average adult males are 10–15 pounds, while females are slightly smaller at 6–12 pounds. In the northern parts of their range—or where they are overfed by humans—raccoons may be a good deal heavier, even exceeding 30 pounds.



The raccoon's diet is highly varied and includes fruits, vegetables, and acorns. Carrion, earthworms, fish, and other aquatic animals, such as crayfish, are eaten when available. Raccoons aren't particularly effective hunters, but they'll eat small animals like birds, amphibians, and mice when the opportunity arises. Their appetite for foods such as grapes and sweet corn often lead to conflicts with home gardeners.

Raccoons are usually active at night, and by day, they retire to denning sites. Dens are made above ground in tree cavities, chimneys and attics, as well as underground in old woodchuck burrows, storm sewers, or crawl spaces under buildings. When they feel secure enough, raccoons may simply lie in thickets or swamps on open ground.

Raccoons generally give birth to three to six young from early spring to early summer. Cubs are weaned at about two months of age, but may remain with their mother through their first winter.

The raccoon is one of four wild animals in the United States considered to be primary carriers of the rabies virus. Despite the concern and fear surrounding rabies, advances in public education, vaccination of pets, and post-exposure treatment have greatly reduced the risk to humans. There has never been a documented human death resulting from the raccoon strain of rabies.

The raccoon roundworm (*Baylisascaris procyonis*), however, is a serious public health concern. This parasite is transmitted through the ingestion or inhalation of eggs passed in raccoon feces. Children should be prevented from playing in areas where raccoons have defecated.

Discouraging Raccoons

Before you begin taking steps to resolve a raccoon problem, make sure the animal causing your headaches really is a raccoon. Raccoons are often blamed for more damage than they actually do, while neighborhood dogs and crows get off scot-free.

You may reduce the chances of raccoon problems by never leaving pet food outside, and keeping secure lids on outside trash cans. Prevention is more practical than removing individual animals. If a good raccoon habitat exists in the vicinity and the original temptation is still there, problems will reoccur.

In Yards & Gardens: Raccoons are attracted to birdseed and suet, and can cause considerable damage to garden fruits and vegetables, particularly grapes and corn. Garden plundering often occurs right before the foods are ready to be picked, so extra vigilance at these times (chasing animals away and using lights or radios to create disturbances) may drive them off long enough to harvest the crop. Fruit trees and bird feeder poles can be protected with conical metal guards that keep animals from climbing.

Rolled-up sod on lawns is also characteristic of raccoon damage and is a result of their search for large grubs such as June bug larvae. If the grub population is high, raccoons may return repeatedly, rolling up extensive areas of sod on successive nights. Treat your lawn for grubs to avoid this problem.

In Buildings: Raccoons will often use uncapped chimneys and attics for denning and for birthing and raising their young. Assuming the animals can leave on their own, harassment techniques can be used to encourage raccoons to move on. Try leaving the attic lights on, and/or placing a battery-operated radio in the denning area, tuned to a talk radio station with the volume turned up. The best time to use these strategies is right before the raccoon would normally leave for her nightly foray. Allow the animals several days to move on. Once you're sure the animals have left, prevent further problems by installing an approved chimney cap or repairing and sealing attic openings. *Never use smoke or fire to drive animals out of chimneys.* This will almost certainly kill young animals—whether raccoons, squirrels, opossums, or birds—who are not physically able to leave on their own.

NOTE: If you hear constant crying, especially during the daylight hours, this usually is an indication that there are baby raccoons that have been orphaned. Time to call in professionals.

In The Garbage: One of the most common areas which attracts raccoons is the area we keep our garbage cans. To discourage wildlife from digging around in our garbage you can do the following:

1. Keep the garbage cans in a closed space such as the garage.
2. Use heavy garbage cans with tight fitting lids.
3. Each time you add garbage to your garbage can pour ammonia over the garbage.
4. Fasten the garbage can lids with heavy rubber bungee cords.

Coyote urine, available at many sporting goods stores, is also an effective repellent for raccoons when applied around gardens, garbage cans, decks and porches.

Top 10 Reasons NOT to Trap and Relocate Wildlife

10. It is not an effective solution. If you remove one animal from your property, another will come to take its place.
9. You will never succeed in eliminating wildlife from your property. As long as you have a source of food or shelter (e.g. accessible trash, pet food left outside, grubs in your lawn, uncapped chimney, holes in your eaves) they will come. Eliminate, fix or secure the source of your problem, and you will solve it with much less wasted effort.
8. Trapping is indiscriminate—you may trap your neighbor's cat or another animal completely unrelated to your nuisance problem.
7. It's not fair. Where do we expect wildlife to exist? Never-ending expansion of urban areas to accommodate the ever-growing human population has left wildlife no choice but to adapt to us. Don't we owe them a little tolerance?
6. It's illegal in the off season. Although it is widely ignored, all forms of trapping are legally limited to designated hunting and trapping seasons. These seasons are defined to allow animals to breed and raise their young during non-hunting and trapping seasons, free from harassment.
5. It is highly stressful to an animal to be trapped and to be relocated. Most animals do not survive in unfamiliar territory. Resident animals will drive off the intruder, or the animal will not know where to find food or shelter, if it is even available. A recent study notes that over 90% of relocated raccoons die within a short period of time.
4. "Humane" traps are anything but humane. Frequently animals do serious injury to themselves trying to escape during the hours they are confined in a live trap.
3. Fear, as a reason for trapping, is irrational. Wild animals have no interest in attacking you, your pets, or your children. Their only reason for aggression is self-defense, and their first choice is always to escape the perceived danger.
2. With just a little effort, we can coexist peacefully with wildlife. If they cause you minor inconvenience, please remember their only motivation is survival. They have no concept of property or damage. There are many more effective and less disruptive alternatives to trapping.**

And the #1 reason NOT to trap and relocate... When you trap and relocate someone's mother might not come home. From early spring until late fall, chances are 50/50 that the animal you trap is a mother, whose babies depend on her for their survival. Taking a mother away from her babies condemns them to a very cruel fate - starvation and death.