



HUMANE WILDLIFE CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDE



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



Is your facility overwhelmed with panicked calls from the public about wildlife problems? Do you spend much staff time and energy dealing with such calls? If so, this manual is for you!

Whether you're an animal control officer, police dispatcher, shelter staffer, wildlife rehabilitator or veterinary or nature center staffer, this manual will give you the answers you need. Our aim is to provide easy, practical solutions—over the phone—for the wildlife dilemmas you encounter daily.

What are the benefits of phone advising?

- Help you resolve problems in a matter of minutes, rather than having personnel respond on site. The labor savings can be huge.
- Provide effective and humane advice for common wildlife problems.
- Correct public perceptions about seemingly “orphaned” wild animals and help people understand when animals truly need help.
- Reduce the number of wild animals that may have otherwise been trapped, relocated and killed in misguided attempts to solve conflicts.
- Increase public tolerance for wildlife and build good will towards your facility or agency.

This manual includes three main sections:

1. **Species-specific profiles** that provide relevant natural history tips and solutions for common problems.
2. **Relevant topics** (*Preventing Orphaning, Rabies Myths and the Reality, What's Wrong with Trap Loan Programs, etc.*).
3. **Appendix** information, such as web resources and HSUS training topics.

This manual contains our best tips and tricks based on decades of experience running a wildlife hotline and hands-on work in the field resolving conflicts with wildlife. We hope this manual helps you handle the public's wildlife problems.

Wild Neighbors: Building Humane Communities

We are excited to announce the launch of our *Wild Neighbors: Building Humane Communities* program! By forming partnerships and working directly with community leaders and animal care and control agencies, we seek to create Wild Neighbors Communities, where humane and non-lethal solutions are given priority when addressing conflicts between people and wildlife. If you are interested in being a Wild Neighbors community, please contact us at wildneighbors@humanesociety.org.



10 Tips for Troubleshooting over the Phone

1. Calm Down the Caller!

- Be sure to convey empathy
- **BE NICE!** Panicked people may be rude, but it's just out of fear. Help them along!

2. You Can Encourage Cooperation and Resolve Problems by:

- Being receptive
- Taking away the threatening elements of the situation
- Educating callers about the animal in a way they can relate to
- Presenting a viable solution

3. Get Good Information!

Ask enough questions so that you can actually SEE the situation

4. Confirm what the Person is Reporting: Are they Interpreting the Situation Correctly?

Confirm species

- From appearance, movement, size, type damage, when active, footprints, scat

Circumstances

- How long has the animal been there?
- Could it have been attacked by a dog or cat?
- What human activities or changes in the immediate environment could have created the situation?

Orphan?

- Age of animal (eyes open? shut? naked? downy? fully-feathered/furred?)
- Would the animal still be with its mother *at that age*?
- Has something happened to the mother? Is she trapped? Was a dead adult seen nearby recently?
- How long has the animal been at that site?
- How is the animal behaving? (crying? wandering? running up to people?)
- Is the animal dehydrated? (eyes sunken, skin "tenting"?)

Sick/Injured?

- Why does caller think so? Remember age-specific behavior differences (e.g. fledgling)

5. Nuisance Problems: Eliminate the Problem, Not the Animal!

What is attracting the animal? Food? Nesting or denning source? Identify what really needs to be removed.

6. Most Animal Problems Are Really People Problems!

Figure out how the *caller's* behavior could be causing the problem

7. Assure the Caller that the Animal is Not "Out to GET Them."

Explain why the animal is doing what it's doing (for food, nesting site, mating season)

8. Assess the Person's Comfort Level if You Give Them Something "Hands-On" to Do

Make sure they understand each step and what to expect

9. Have Good References Handy!

Book: *Wild Neighbors* by HSUS **Websites:** wildneighbors.org; wildlifeline.org

10. Make Good Referrals

- Use humanesociety.org/wildliferehab to find a wildlife rehabilitator; make sure the rehabilitator handles the species before referring the call
- Review our *Suggested Guidelines for Working with a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator* (page 26)

Rabbits Alone in Nest

ADVICE: If the nest is intact and the babies are not injured, leave them alone! Like deer, mother rabbits only visit their young 2-3 times a day to avoid attracting predators. So finding babies alone in the nest is normal. If the nest has been disturbed, or if you think the babies are orphaned, you can put a tic-tac-toe pattern of sticks, string or yarn over the nest to assess if the mother is returning to nurse them. If the "pattern is displaced or pushed aside, but the nest is still covered 12 hours later, the mother has returned.

REFERRAL to a wildlife rehabilitator if the tic-tac-toe pattern remains undisturbed for 12+ hours or if a cat has had any of them in his mouth. **NOTE:** It is vital to keep cats and dogs away from the helpless young rabbits or they will be killed or mangled. Tell callers not to touch the baby rabbits—mother rabbits are very sensitive to foreign smells and may abandon their young if handled. **Emphasize that the single most important thing a caller can do to help wildlife is to turn their outdoor cat into an indoor one!** Paint the picture: If the cat is not taken in immediately (and kept inside), all the babies in the nest are likely to die a horrible death because the cat now knows where they are.

Baby Raccoon Seen Alone

ADVICE: If the baby raccoon has been seen for more than a few hours, he has most likely lost his mother, since mother raccoons closely supervise their young and don't let them out of their sight much. Often when the mother has been trapped or killed, the hungry babies will start chittering and wandering away from their dens after about three days without mom. You can put an upside-down laundry basket over the baby (with a one-pound weight on top) and monitor it for a few hours. Ask around to see if anyone in the neighborhood trapped an adult raccoon or saw one hit by a car.

REFERRAL: Refer to a wildlife rehabilitator if the mother doesn't retrieve her cub after a few hours.

Baby Skunk Seen Alone

ADVICE: Skunks are very near-sighted and follow their mother nose-to-tail. They sometimes lose sight of her when a car or dog scatters them. Monitor from a distance to see if she returns. You can put a plastic laundry basket upside down over the skunk to temporarily contain him while waiting for mom to return. Advise the caller to approach the skunk slowly and talk softly – if the skunk gives a warning by stamping his front feet, then stand still or back off. Try to approach again after skunk calms down. As baby skunks get older, they sometimes come out to explore while the mother is away. Most of the time, they don't appear without her, particularly during the day.

REFERRAL: Contact a wildlife rehabilitator if you repeatedly see the baby outside alone and/or a dead skunk has been found in the caller's yard or neighborhood. The caller might want to ask around to see if any neighbor has been trapping and recently took away an adult skunk (a common cause of this problem).

Orphaned Duckling

ADVICE: If you know what pond the duckling came from, take him back to rejoin his family. If the duckling was left behind and his origin is unknown (e.g. he was fished out of storm drain or spillway), you can contain the duckling with an upside-down laundry basket. Monitor from a distance to see if mom returns. The mother will see the duckling through the lattice sides of the basket and make contact. If she returns, slowly approach and overturn the basket so she can collect her young. If this doesn't work, contact a wildlife rehabilitator

Orphaned Gosling

ADVICE: Try to reunite the gosling with her family if you can find them. If this isn't possible, know that Canada geese will accept unrelated goslings and raise them as their own. So try releasing the gosling close to a goose family with similar aged young. Monitor from afar to ensure the gosling is accepted. As a last resort, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.



Coyotes and Foxes

humane.org/coyotes | humane.org/foxes



RELEVANT NATURAL HISTORY

Both coyotes and foxes are members of the *canid* family. Coyotes look similar to medium-sized dogs and are often confused with German Shepherds. Foxes are slightly smaller. There are five species of foxes in North America, but only two—the red and the gray—are found in urban settings. The most accurate way to tell a red fox from a gray fox is by looking at the tail: red foxes have a white tip at the end of their tail; gray foxes do not.

Contrary to popular myth, coyotes and foxes are not looking to attack people and drag off their children. They seek out small easy prey like mice, chipmunks, shrews, rabbits and squirrels, as well as human-produced food such as garbage or outdoor pet food. They are adaptable opportunists who don't mind living close to people in suburban and urban settings, their presence often going unnoticed. However, people may be surprised to see a coyote or fox in their backyard—and that surprise often leads to unnecessary panic.

WHAT TO TELL CALLERS

Daytime Sighting of Coyote or Fox

ADVICE: It is perfectly natural behavior for a coyote or fox to be outside during the day, especially during the spring and summer when they are busy hunting rodents to feed their young. Just seeing a fox or coyote during the day doesn't mean the animal is rabid, aggressive or dangerous.

Brazen Coyote or Fox

ADVICE: Coyotes and foxes may lose their natural fear of people when they find free sources of human-associated food (e.g. pet food left on porches) in neighborhoods and have repeated contact with people with no negative consequences. You can teach an overly bold coyote or fox to be wary of people by using negative conditioning or "hazing." To do that, be big and scary: raise your arms over your head and yell or blow a whistle, bang metal pot tops together as you move towards the animal or spray the animal's hindquarters with a hose or water gun. Hazing works best if you keep the negative reinforcement going until you run the animal off the property.

Attacks on Domestic Pets

ADVICE: People often worry that their outdoor cat will be attacked by a fox. They don't realize that foxes only weigh 10-15 pounds and are too small to take on an adult cat. Smaller pets (such as kittens, rabbits, chickens or guinea pigs) left outside could be at risk, though, and should either be kept indoors or in secure enclosures outside.

It is perfectly normal behavior for coyotes to prey on outdoor cats, which is why it is so important for people to keep cats indoors. Small dogs left outside unattended are also at risk of coyote attacks, especially in the spring and summer when coyotes are hunting to feed their pups. To protect pets, instruct people never to let their pets outside unattended and to keep pet food inside. During the winter months (coyote breeding season), it's also important to keep large dogs on a leash as coyotes may view large off-leash dogs as a threat to their mates.

Foxes and Chicken Coops

ADVICE: The only effective way to protect your chickens is to reinforce the coop so coyotes and foxes can't get in. 16-gauge or better welded wire with 1 inch by 1 inch openings should be installed to keep them out. Although reinforcing a pen may be a temporary inconvenience, once an animal pen is wildlife-proofed, the problem is solved.

Fox Kits or Coyote Pups Playing in the Yard

ADVICE: In the spring it is normal to see fox kits or coyote pups romping and tumbling in the yard, playing like puppies. The play activity they are exhibiting is all in preparation to go out on hunting trips with mom, but they are not quite ready to go yet. They will be accompanying her soon and their use of the den and yard will only last a short while longer. As cute as the kits/pups are, it is important that callers are advised not to feed them or initiate contact in order to ensure that they don't lose their fear of humans, which will lead to a host of serious problems. Instead, leave them alone. If they get too close, callers can clap their hands and yell to scare the kits/pups and teach them to associate humans with a negative stimulus. Orphaned pups or kits are very rare, as both parents aid in the rearing of their young (unlike most other mammals, who are raised by the mother only).

Coyote/Fox Den on Property

ADVICE: People are often surprised to discover a coyote or fox den near their property. This is no cause for alarm. It can be a lot of fun (and a great photo opportunity) to watch a fox or coyote family grow up.

If the animals absolutely *must* be evicted, harassment strategies can be used to encourage them to leave. Dirty, sweaty socks or rags sprinkled with vinegar can be put into the den entrance along with a blaring radio. This should make the coyotes or foxes uncomfortable and motivate them to move on. However, they may be resistant—it can be a lot of work to find and excavate a new den.

BETTER OPTION: After learning that their fears were unfounded, many people find that letting the coyote or fox family stay is the easiest option, and one which becomes a memorable rare treat! Encourage callers to just enjoy them.

Opossums Eating Garbage

ADVICE: Like most wildlife, opossums will take advantage of open or spilled garbage containers, so the solution is better containment. People can secure trash lids with bungee cords, get an *Animal Stopper* brand garbage can (which has built-in bungee cords), put the garbage out the morning of trash pick-up, or get an outdoor storage enclosure for trash cans from a home building store. Trapping won't work to solve the problem because as long as there's a food source, wild animals will keep coming to it.

Opossum in Garage

ADVICE: Opossums may wander into garages when the door is left open. First, remove access to food (example: bird seed bags) or trash. Then open the garage door **before dusk** and sprinkle an 8-inch band of white flour under it—and watch for exiting footprints. Close the door once the animal is gone.

Opossum Stuck in Fence or in Tree

ADVICE: Make sure the opossum is really stuck! If a dog has run him up a tree or onto a fence, he won't move until the threat is long gone. If the opossum is truly stuck in a fence, contact your local ACO or rehabilitator for help.

Opossums Under Deck/Shed

ADVICE: No need to do anything, as opossums are nomadic and will leave on their own very soon. They are gentle and non-aggressive animals who will not attack anyone. If the caller won't tolerate them, the caller can seal off the deck or shed using an L-shape barrier design, but it is critical not to entrap animals or separate parents from babies who will starve without them (caution: there may be other wildlife using the deck or shed). We generally recommend sealing off the deck with mesh while leaving one exit hole and putting a one-way door (or *animal excluder*—available from Tomahawk Live Trap Co.) over that hole so that the opossum can leave but not return. Leave the door in place for at least three days.

Opossum in Trash Can

ADVICE: Opossums are attracted by the smell of food but get stuck inside and can't climb out. Slowly tip the can on its side and the opossum will come out when he's ready (they don't move when scared, so it may take awhile). If the caller is uncomfortable doing this, they can also use a broom to gently tip the trash can over. Remind them to get a secure lid for the trash can (or use bungee cords or get the *Animal Stopper* brand trash can) so the problem doesn't recur.

Opossum in Window Well

ADVICE: Put a thick branch or board in the window well so the opossum can climb out. Rest assured—he won't jump up and attack! Be sure to get a window well cover (inexpensive from home-building stores) after the opossum is gone or this problem may happen again.

Opossum in Trap

ADVICE: Open the trap door and then prop it open with a rock or a book so the opossum can leave on his own after he has recovered from his own fear response. When opossums are scared, they hiss and open their mouth wide in fear, but they hold their ground. Tell the caller to stay a good distance from the trap, and the opossum will leave once the coast is clear. He won't come out and attack; he's too scared!

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. Assess whether the raccoon is acting strangely—is she circling, dragging herself, acting injured or unusually aggressive? If yes, then this is **ACTIONABLE**—contact the local ACO for assistance.

Raccoon Disoriented, Falling down, Circling or Showing Unprovoked Aggression

ACTIONABLE: The local ACO should be called to handle the situation.

Raccoons Eating Cat Food

ADVICE: It's no wonder raccoons are responding to the free buffet. Who wouldn't? The best solution is to make a practice of feeding cats *indoors*. If the cats 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. The cats will get used to the new schedule and modify their behavior accordingly. Trapping the raccoons won't help since other wild animals will continually be attracted to the cat food—and baby raccoons will be left behind to starve when and if their mothers are 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. This allows the raccoon to climb up the pole and into the closed pipe, but she can go no further. The pipe must be at least 24 inches long to prevent the raccoon from climbing over it and set at least four feet off the ground (up to the bottom part of the baffle) to keep her from jumping over it.

Raccoons in Garage

ADVICE: If it's a raccoon that just wandered in through an open door, remove access to food (example: bird seed bags) or trash. Then open the garage door *before dusk* and 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: Either let them stay until they leave on their own (the kindest and best option), or try to evict them by placing vinegar-doused rags and a blaring radio in the garage near the den site. It may take the mother awhile 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. Most likely it's a hungry orphan who will follow anything that moves, but it could also be a sick baby.

Raccoons in Attic or Chimney

ADVICE: In spring and summer, mother raccoons take advantage of chimneys and attics for raising cubs. For a raccoon in a chimney, the easiest solution is to keep the damper closed and wait a few weeks for the raccoons to move out on their own. As soon as the cubs are old enough—about eight weeks old—to go on outings with their mother, she will usually move them to a more accessible den. If you want to prevent reoccurrence, have a chimney sweep clean the flue and cap it, but make sure they visually inspect the chimney and smoke shelf to confirm that the raccoon family has moved on.

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, they can be encouraged to move on.

Evicting chimney-dwelling raccoons: Keep the damper closed and put a blaring radio (rock or rap music or a barking dog tape work best) in the fireplace. Then put a bowl of vinegar on a footstool near the damper. Apply these deterrents JUST BEFORE DUSK; mother raccoons won't want to move their cubs in broad daylight. Be patient—it may take a few days for the mother to move her young. Once the raccoons are gone, promptly 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 rap or rock 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 3 successive nights. If so, 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.*

Baby Skunks Around Dead Mother

REFERRAL: Refer to a licensed rehabilitator. In the meantime, ask the caller to put an upside-down laundry basket over the baby skunks so they don't wander off.

Bad Odor in House

ADVICE: A vial of *Odors Away* can be purchased from a hardware store to neutralize the bad odor. Put a few drops in a bowl and place in any room that smells. Add new drops every day. If the odor persists for weeks, it may be a dead skunk and professional assistance will be needed.

Skunks in Garage

ADVICE: Skunks wander into garages when the door is left open. To get them out, open the garage door before dusk and sprinkle an 8-inch band of flour under it, watch for exiting footprints, and then close the door.

Skunks Eating Garbage

ADVICE: The answer is to contain the trash better so that other animals are not able to push over or spread trash on the ground for the skunk to find. People can secure trash lids with bungee cords, get an Animal Stopper garbage can (which has built-in bungees), put the garbage out the morning of trash pickup, or get an outdoor storage container for trash cans from a home building store. Trapping won't solve the problem because as long as there's a food source, animals will keep being attracted to it.

Skunk in Window Well

Skunks fall into window wells because they don't see well, and then they get stuck because they're poor climbers.

SELF-HELP OPTIONS: The caller can try putting a wide board, slanted at a <45 degree angle, into the window well if it isn't too deep (with a towel or mesh attached, for traction) so the skunk can climb out. Another very effective option is to wear gloves and slowly lower a small rectangular plastic garbage can (with cheese inside as bait) into the well. Make sure the can is on its side so the skunk can easily walk into it. Then tip the can up a bit (so the skunk doesn't fall out while he's eating the cheese), raise it to ground level then slowly lower it on its side so the skunk can amble out. If you move slowly and talk softly, the skunk won't spray you—they respond to fast movement coming at them. Be sure to tell the caller they must get a window well cover (homemade or inexpensive from home-building stores) after the skunk is gone or this problem may occur again.

Skunk with Head Stuck in Yogurt Cup

SELF-HELP OPTION: If the caller is determined and capable of helping, tell them that the skunk won't spray anything he can't see, so the caller can grab hold of the yogurt cup while wearing gloves. Upon feeling resistance, the skunk will pull back and his head should pop out. Stand motionless—the skunk will usually blink a few times and then make a beeline for home.

REFERRAL: Refer to a rehabilitator or ACO to help remove the yogurt container if it is on too tight or if the caller is not willing to try the self-help option. Have the caller put a laundry basket or milk crate (with a heavy rock on top) over the skunk to keep him from wandering off. When his head is entrapped, he may run frantically into the street and cause car accidents.

Skunk Fell Into Pool

ADVICE: Skunks fall into pools fairly often because of their poor eyesight. The caller can put a pool skimmer or broom underneath him and gently lift him out. The skunk may be exhausted from swimming and may need some time to recover. If the skunk does not leave on his own after two hours, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.



Woodchucks

humanesociety.org/woodchucks



RELEVANT NATURAL HISTORY

Woodchucks are also called groundhogs, gophers or “whistle-pigs.” Despite their burly looks, woodchucks are shy, timid creatures who pop up in yards after a long winter hibernation. Their burrows usually have several entry and exit points which they scurry into when alarmed. Suburbia provides the perfect habitat—our raised decks, stoops and sheds provide cover and a perfect site to raise young, and our lush lawns and gardens provide a virtual buffet. Most woodchuck conflicts occur in summer, when the war is on for who gets to eat the garden vegetables! This is also just when baby rearing season occurs, which is why orphaned young will be left behind unless problems are resolved correctly.

WHAT TO TELL CALLERS

Woodchuck Seen in Daytime

ADVICE: This is normal; woodchucks are usually active in the daytime. This does not indicate rabies.

Fear of Woodchucks Harming Children

ADVICE: Woodchucks are timid creatures who scamper off when scared. Remember that even a small child looks like a giant predator to the woodchuck. There is no cause for alarm—healthy woodchucks aren’t interested in children or pets; their diet is 100% vegetarian. If chased, woodchucks will quickly flee to their burrows.

Woodchuck Acting Aggressive, Chasing People

ACTIONABLE: The caller should contact an ACO and keep people and pets inside.

Woodchuck Circling and Falling Over

ACTIONABLE: The caller can contact an ACO for assistance

ADVICE: The woodchuck may be rabid, but it’s more likely to be a brain parasite called roundworm, which causes symptoms that look exactly like rabies. Either way, the ACO can assess and handle the situation. Keep children and pets away from the animal.



Why Not Trap and Relocate Wildlife?

Setting a trap for an animal may sound like a good idea, but the truth is that live-trapping and relocating wildlife is not a viable solution.

Trapping an animal is perceived as a quick fix, but it's not likely to solve your problem. In many cases, it makes the problem worse:

- Trapping and removing wildlife is a short-term solution because it doesn't address what is attracting animals to a specific site in the first place. As long as food attractants (garbage, outdoor pet food) and den sites remain at the initial location, other animals will soon replace those removed.
- Trapped animals are often nursing mothers whose young get left behind when Mom is taken away and, as a result, the young die of starvation (for example, baby raccoons who have been orphaned can suffer for up to 10 days before dying).
- Setting a trap does not guarantee that you will catch the animal causing the conflict as it is common for other animals (including pets) to be lured into the trap.
- Despite being marketed as humane, live traps can be dangerous and cause animals to suffer. Trapped animals can severely injure themselves in their frantic attempts to escape. When left too long in a trap or when exposed to extreme weather conditions, they can even die.

Relocating animals elsewhere may sound like a good solution, but it is not because:

- Studies show that relocated animals have an extremely low survival rate due to:
 - territorial disputes with resident animals
 - inability to find food, water and den sites
 - no knowledge of safe areas or "escape corridors" to hide or get away from predators
 - increased movement across roads in an effort to return "home" or to get back to their young.
- Relocating animals outside of their home-range may spread disease to surrounding wildlife populations.
- Euthanizing healthy wildlife is not an alternative to relocation. It is costly, time-consuming and entirely unnecessary for successful conflict resolution.

An animal's best chance for survival is within her own home range where she knows the location of food, water and den sites, as well as places to flee from danger. For tips on dealing with wildlife conflicts, please visit wildneighbors.org.

What's Wrong with Trap-Loan Programs?

As a local shelter or animal control facility, you might loan traps to the public in an attempt to accommodate public calls about wildlife conflicts. The HSUS strongly discourages trap-loan programs because they not only amplify the consequences detailed above (Why Not Trap and Relocate), but they significantly burden your facility. The staff and facility resources spent on the service and field response could otherwise be put toward providing information that solves people's wildlife problems for the long-term.

As a far better alternative, The HSUS encourages "information loan" programs where people who have wildlife conflicts are given information instead of a trap. Only if the problem can't be resolved with self-help information should the caller be referred to someone who can intervene. The result of an "information loan" program is that nuisance wildlife complaints drop dramatically, the burden on animal control officers and shelter staff is greatly reduced, and people learn to resolve their problems in a more effective and humane manner.

Q: What should I tell callers who have been bitten by a potentially rabid animal or handled their own animal who was in a fight?

A: They should be advised to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, monitor the biting animal's whereabouts and immediately contact their local animal control officer for assistance in capturing the animal for rabies testing. Then, they should contact their local health department for instructions and to report the incident. Next, they should contact their physician for further advice. If they're unsure whether the bite broke skin on their hands, they can put their hands in rubbing alcohol to see whether and where it stings. Questions about rabies should go to the health department.

WHAT TO TELL CALLERS: Species Specific Questions

Q: Don't a lot of bats carry rabies?

A: Actually, a very small percentage of bats carry rabies, much less than one percent of the population at any time. However, if you suspect that a rabid bat has bitten you or if a bat is found in the room where a person is sleeping or incapacitated, current health guidelines recommend that the bat be tested for rabies. Contact your local health department for instructions.

Q: Isn't a fox seen by day rabid?

A: Foxes haven't read the textbooks telling them to be nocturnal. They are active when mice and other small prey are active, which is why it's common to see foxes hunting by day. It's also normal for kits to be seen playing by themselves, seemingly without parental supervision, and showing little fear of people. Kits are left behind for short periods of time while the parents go off hunting, something that continues until the kits are old enough to go along.

Q: I see a baby raccoon outside during the day—is it rabid?

A: It's possible that this baby has been temporarily separated from mom or that he/she is truly orphaned. When baby raccoons are orphaned, they don't know night from day—they only know that they are extremely hungry. If the baby isn't retrieved by mom after several hours (mom rarely leaves her cubs alone for long), then use heavy gloves or a trowel to push the baby into a cardboard box with a ventilated top and a flannel shirt for comfort. Do not touch the raccoon with your bare hands. Go to humanesociety.org/wildliferehab to locate a rehabilitator licensed to take in raccoons.

Q: There's a baby skunk running around by day—is the skunk rabid?

A: It's possible, but it's more likely that the skunk has lost sight of the mother because skunks are so near-sighted. Advise the caller to put a plastic laundry basket upside-down over the skunk to hold her in place and to give mom a chance to retrieve her (mom will be able to flip up the edge of the basket). If the skunk appears truly orphaned, go to humanesociety.org/wildliferehab to locate a rehabilitator.

Q: There's an opossum hissing and drooling at me—is the opossum rabid?

A: For unknown reasons, opossums are amazingly resistant to rabies. Hissing, drooling and swaying are part of the opossum's bluff routine to scare YOU (and other predators) away. Unlike other animals, opossums don't always flee when they're scared; they tend to hold their ground and rely on a number of behaviors to scare off the threat. Advise callers to leave the opossum alone, and eventually he'll wander off.

Q: I see a woodchuck circling and falling over—is he rabid?

A: For unknown reasons, woodchucks are more prone to contracting rabies than other species of rodents. Woodchucks are also susceptible to the roundworm brain parasite, which causes behavior that looks exactly like rabies. Roundworm is transmitted through the ingestion of an infected animal's feces. Keep people and companion animals away from any sick-acting woodchuck and contact your local animal control officer or rehabilitator for assistance.

- d. NWCO will check all trapped mammals *prior to release* for signs of lactation (enlarged nipples) during the birthing and rearing seasons (spring–fall) to ensure that a mother is not separated from her young or that the young are NOT left behind to starve.
 - e. If the young are not retrieved, the NWCO will make every effort to take the orphan(s) to a wildlife rehabilitator for placement.
5. **NWCO Will Educate the Homeowner About and Use Exclusion Strategies to Permanently Solve Problem** and be equipped to do exclusion work themselves (i. e. install chimney caps, repair holes). *The NWCO's goal must be to handle the source of the problem (an open cavity or food source) not just the symptom (the animal).*
6. **NWCO Will Euthanize Animals Only if they are Mortally Injured, Sick, Endangering Public Safety, or if it's Required by Law.**

NOTE: With rabies-vector species (ex: raccoon, skunk, fox) the NWCO usually has two options according to some state policies: to release on-site or euthanize. The NWCO should make every attempt to release on-site (with homeowner's permission) and seal off the animal's denning cavity rather than automatically killing healthy animals.

Acceptable euthanasia methods are those approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association, which include: carbon dioxide chamber (CO₂), proper carbon monoxide chamber (i. e. NOT car exhaust), gunshot or lethal injection by veterinarian. The NWCO must agree to follow the AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia (see most recent Euthanasia Panel Report of the AVMA) excepting any extenuating circumstances that involve human health or safety.

7. **NWCO Will Not Use Inhumane Killing Methods** such as drowning, car exhaust, acetone injections, kill traps (conibear traps, neck snare devices) glue traps, poisons or smoke bombs.



People may be surprised to find raccoon families denning in their chimney, yet this is a rather common occurrence. We urge people to cap their chimneys if they don't want unexpected guests! Even if just a temporary fix until the final more major repair can be done by a professional.

have a map in their head of where they live.”

Without that cognitive geography, relocated animals struggle to find food and den sites. Some die along the way or become ill from extreme stress. Once transported, animals may introduce disease to the new environment, some scientists believe. And too often, they leave behind something precious: their babies.

At the Cape Wildlife Center, Lynn Miller has seen her share of broken family units—including motherless fox kits delivered by a homeowner and baby raccoons orphaned after a nuisance wildlife control company trapped an adult nesting in a chimney. “That case especially bugged the heck out of me,” says Miller, director of wildlife rehabilitation at the Massachusetts facility, operated by The Fund for Animals in partnership with The HSUS. “Owners want it fixed, and they want it fixed now, so they pay somebody megabucks to come in and trap and remove.”

A cheaper, simpler solution of using light and sound to harass the mother would have been far more humane, says Miller. Since wild animals keep several alternate denning sites on reserve, the raccoon could have moved her babies to a safer space if given the chance. Instead, the family was needlessly split apart.

Aside from the negative effects on the animals themselves, trapping rarely solves conflicts. Sometimes animals left behind are juveniles still learning to find food and shelter; without parents as guides, they may turn to garbage and other human food sources, compounding the very problem a homeowner is attempting to address. And removing animals from an environment without considering what brought them there in the first place effectively puts out a vacancy sign, says Miller: “If one animal has found this area to be desirable, there’s a good reason.”

“The standard thought about nature is that it exists somewhere else, outside the perimeter of my house,” says John Griffin, director of Humane Wildlife Services, an HSUS program that helps homeowners humanely remove animals from within or beneath structures and releases them into

surrounding familiar territory with their families intact. “But animals don’t recognize the difference between human-built habitat and ‘natural’ habitat. Habitat is habitat to them. If it can support them, if it has food, if it has shelter, it doesn’t matter if a human built it. If it’s a tree or a chimney or a shed, it doesn’t matter.”

In a society relatively out of sync with the rhythms of the natural world, however, the mere sight of a fox family under a porch can cause panic in people unfamiliar with the quiet ubiquity of foxes. Some homeowners have spent thousands of dollars trapping them, a practice so pointless Griffin likens it to trying to catch birds out of the sky. “Oftentimes foxes are here right

under our noses,” he says. “They’re just so good at using marginal habitat that we don’t even realize it.”

Learning the natural history and behaviors of backyard species can go a long way toward living peacefully alongside them. While humane solutions to common problems exist, the kindest strategy of all—especially for wild animal families raising their young—is to watch, wait, enjoy and realize that animals are more like us than not. They need to feed their babies, avoid danger and stay warm. They aren’t trying to take over our properties, steal our gardens, attack our children or invade our homes. From their perspective, this is their home, after all, and their world, too.



HUMANE SOLUTIONS

GET SPECIES SMART: Respect for those around us starts with greater understanding of their habits and needs. One of the most maligned backyard species—the opossum—is also the most benign. Beneficial to gardeners because of an appetite for insects and rodents often considered pests, they’re also wanderers who typically den in other

animals’ burrows for short periods before moving on. “To do anything to a possum is just the silliest thing in the world,” says John Griffin of Humane Wildlife Services. With a little perspective, we may realize we don’t really have a problem at all.

HUMANELY EVICT: Waiting for nesting animals to leave on their own is preferable, but the next best strategy is to gently encourage them to move along to a new site. This is core to the philosophy of Humane Wildlife Services, which humanely excludes parents from re-entry into structures while helping ensure they can transport their young to alternate dens. For homeowners, gentle harassment techniques such as cider-vinegar-soaked rags, blaring radios and lights encourage unwanted houseguests to hit the road.

RESHAPE THE ENVIRONMENT: Once animals have moved on and it’s clear that no babies are left in a given space, animal-proofing the structure is key to preventing the entry of more furry guests. Griffin’s team adds chimney caps, seals porches and sheds, and helps homeowners create other barriers to re-entry. For gardeners, temporary or permanent fencing is the most effective deterrent.

+ FIND MORE tips at humanesociety.org/wildlifesolutions.

LOCAL RESOURCE LIST



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES
www.wildneighbors.org



Wildlife Rehabilitators: _____

Humane NWCOS: _____

Tree Climbers: _____

Chimney Service: _____

Volunteers/Wildlife Rescuers: _____

State Wildlife Dept.: _____

Other: _____

