



# Nuisance Wildlife

## *problems and strategies*

**RACCOONS.** Don't give raccoons a free handout. Keep pet food indoors, clean up spilled garbage, and secure lids on garbage cans.

Keep garage, shed, and basement doors closed. Crowded storage areas offer many attractive nooks for a nesting raccoon.

Raccoons are primarily nocturnal, so efforts at exclusion should be carried out at night.

The raccoon nesting period is March–June. It is imperative to exclude them from your home during this period. Once they set up shop and have young, it is extremely difficult to convince them to vacate. They will chew through just about anything except metal to get to their young.

Raccoons, especially young raccoons, make a lot of noise. Determining if you have them in the house should not be a problem.

Chimneys are a favorite raccoon entry point. Cap them with stout hardware cloth prior to spring.

Try ammonia-soaked rags or moth balls to force raccoons out of enclosed spaces. Poisons are not recommended, as they are not target-specific.

Raccoon feces may contain roundworm eggs, which pose a serious health threat if accidentally ingested. These eggs are very resistant and remain viable for prolonged periods. Be extra careful when removing accumulated droppings. Better to keep raccoons out in the first place.

Under no circumstances should you handle or raise raccoons—or any wildlife, for that matter. Raccoons are particularly susceptible to rabies in New York (although only a small percentage will actually have it). Report any

contact with raccoons (bite, scratch, or handling) to your local Health Department.

Raccoons may be destroyed on your property if they are causing property damage, if they are a nuisance, if they are a health concern, or if they appear to be sick. Follow all state and local rules regarding the discharge of firearms, and do not handle the carcass with bare hands. A 10% solution of bleach in water will kill the rabies virus on surfaces. (That's 9 parts water, 1 part bleach.)

You may not live-trap wildlife, transport it off your property, and release it elsewhere. Not only is it illegal, but doing so may be giving someone else a nuisance problem and may be spreading rabies further.

**SQUIRRELS.** Red squirrels are smaller than grays and are found near pine woods; gray squirrels are larger and are found near hardwood trees. Both can be destructive, but red squirrels are more apt to damage wood by gnawing.

Holes 1½ inches and larger are possible entry points. Trim overhanging tree branches that allow them access to roof, exterior walls, and downspouts.

All squirrels (except flying squirrels) are out during the day, so seal holes only during the day. Avoid sealing holes from March–June, as you may be trapping young inside.

Squirrels, like most small mammals, can be legally destroyed if they are causing damage, if they are a nuisance, or if they present a health concern. Follow all local and state regulations. Rat traps are a good option inside the house, and outside, if care is taken to avoid non-target catches.

Keep spilled birdseed cleaned up and try to keep squirrels out of your feeder (not easy). Cap chimneys with screening or hardware cloth to prevent entry.

Try ammonia-soaked rags or moth balls to force squirrels out of enclosed spaces. Poisons are not recommended, as they are not target-specific.

**SKUNKS.** Generally, skunks won't be in your house; they'll be under it. You usually know because of the smell. Try ammonia-soaked rags or moth balls under the house or shed to drive skunks out.

Also watch for dug-up areas on your lawn. Skunks love grubs and will tear up your yard looking for them. Don't worry about skunks climbing. They will be a problem at ground level only.

As with most nuisance wildlife, you'll want to exclude them before they decide to have young in the spring. Also, keep pet food indoors and keep garbage cans secure.

Skunks are another species known to carry rabies. Be careful to avoid contact, but report any contact (bite, scratch, or handling) to your local Health Department. Sick skunks may be difficult to identify due to their normally slow, shuffling gait.

Keep pets, especially dogs, away from skunks on your property. The first time a dog comes home after being sprayed, you'll know why. Try washing the dog in tomato juice or in the following solution:

- 1 quart 3% hydrogen peroxide
- ¼ cup baking soda
- 1 teaspoon liquid soap



You can also obtain commercial products from a pet supply store.

Skunks may be legally destroyed when they are causing damage, when they are sick, or when they are a health concern. Be advised that they may empty their scent glands when they die, however. If destroying a skunk, do so well away from the house. Unless you feel lucky, live-trapping skunks is a job better left to professionals!

**BATS.** Little brown bats (the most common) can gain access through as small as a 3/8-inch opening.

The best time to exclude bats is late summer; they are hibernating or with young October–June. Seal holes at night while the bats are out.

Build bat houses and place them around your property to lure bats away from your house and provide bat habitat. Contact the DEC's Bureau of Wildlife to obtain bat house plans.

Avoid killing bats; they eat many insects and mosquitoes. Poisons are not recommended, as they are not target-specific.

Look for entry holes high on the house—under eaves, at roof peaks, roof and soffit vents, and chimneys. They may roost behind shutters, but usually don't get into the house from there.

Look for scratch marks on vertical surfaces and for droppings on flat surfaces under entry holes.

Carefully watch areas around the house exterior at dusk to learn the location of exit holes. Once you know where the bats are exiting, close off all exits except one. After the bats are out, close the last exit.

One-way doors or flaps can be installed over holes to allow bats out—but not back in. Or staple a foot-long stocking (with the toe cut off) over the hole.

Make sure there are no entry points from the attic or other bat roosts *into your living space*. If you find a bat in your living space or have any contact with a bat (bite, scratch, or handling), report it to your local Health Department.

**WOODCHUCKS.** When woodchucks move in near your home or under your deck (a favorite spot), your flowers and vegetables may be decimated. You could also have sev-

**RABIES.** Rabies is a deadly disease that can be contracted by any mammal. It's most common in bats, raccoons, foxes, and skunks, and it's passed along to others through nervous tissue or saliva. Testing of the brain tissue or spinal fluid of the animal is necessary to confirm the presence of rabies if a person or pet has had contact with the animal.

Nocturnal animals DO come out during the day. Often. This, alone, is not a sign of illness. Pet food, bird seed, and garbage can be powerful attractants. Weather changes also affect wildlife.

**How a rabid animal MAY behave:**

- Unusual aggressiveness or tameness.
- Excessive drooling, "foaming at the mouth."
- Dragging the hind legs, mobility problems.

**When to call the Health Department:**

- Wildlife had contact with a person or pet.
- Human contact with pet after pet/wildlife fight.
- Bat found in the living space of your home.



COUNTY	BUSINESS HOURS	AFTER HOURS	COUNTY	BUSINESS HOURS	AFTER HOURS
Chemung	607-737-2019	607-737-2044	Schuyler	607-535-8140	607-535-8222
Genesee	585-344-2580	585-343-5000	Seneca	315-539-1945	315-539-9241
Livingston	585-243-7280	585-243-7100	Steuben	800-724-0471	800-836-4444
Monroe	585-274-6864	585-274-7970	Wayne	315-946-5749	315-946-9711
Ontario	585-396-4343	585-394-4560	Yates	315-536-5160	315-536-4438
Orleans	585-589-2769	585-589-5527			

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If you'd rather hire someone to handle the problem for you, contact the Bureau of Wildlife for a list of Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators.

eral holes in your yard for just one woodchuck, as they like to have a hole close by to dive into when they feel threatened.

Woodchucks aren't protected and may be taken in any safe manner. Bait a live trap/box trap with apples or other fresh fruit. Or use a No. 2 steel trap, but only in areas where there is no possibility of catching domestic animals. Check the traps twice daily so that the trapped woodchuck can be dealt with in a humane manner.

You may not live-trap wildlife, transport it off your property, and release it elsewhere. Not only is it illegal, but doing so may be giving someone else a nuisance problem and, for animals prone to rabies, may be spreading the disease further.

If the burrow is not under or near buildings, you can place a gas cartridge in the hole to suffocate the woodchuck. Check with your local home and garden center or hardware store for availability. □