

TIPS FOR REDUCING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS AROUND THE HOME IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

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Backyard wildlife management is a major initiative throughout the United States. Residents spend billions of dollars each year to attract and deter wildlife. Most people enjoy observing wildlife near their homes if there are no associated problems. However, human-wildlife conflicts are common. Attracting wildlife around the home is relatively simple. If you provide food, cover, and water for a particular wildlife species that commonly occurs in your area, that species may spend time around your home if it tolerates being in proximity to human activity. However, managing nuisance wildlife and human-wildlife conflicts can be complicated. The intent of this publication is to outline various practices to help reduce conflicts with wildlife and supplement the YouTube video, “Tips for Reducing Wildlife Damage around the Home,” through the UTIA School of Natural Resources.



LANDSCAPING

The type and arrangement of plants around the home strongly influence wildlife occurrence. Plant composition and structure determine food and cover value for various species. If you want to attract a particular wildlife species, then you landscape with plants that provide food and cover for that species. Alternatively, landscaping with plants that do not provide food or cover and manipulating the arrangement of those plants so they do not favor a particular wildlife species will help deter that species from spending considerable time around your home. Consider the following tips to better prevent human-wildlife conflicts:

- 1) avoid plants that provide a food source or dense cover
- 2) maintain at least 3-feet of open space between vegetation and the home
- 3) arrange plants so that there is open space around them (i.e. shrubbery or trees do not touch)
- 4) remove groundcover near the home
- 5) keep mulch beds in order and do not allow thatch build-up
- 6) remove brush piles near the home
- 7) place firewood at least 35 feet from the home
- 8) use native plants and avoid nonnative plants that may become invasive

FEEDING WILDLIFE

Feeding wildlife is a leading cause of human-wildlife conflicts. Even a simple bird feeder that provides seed attracts rodents. In general, feeding wildlife can cause problems and should be avoided, especially any type of feeding other than a bird feeder. One of the worst types of feeding activity involves the use of corn. Corn and other grains provided to wildlife commonly harbor aflatoxins that can cause physiological problems for wildlife, and these foods also attract a wide variety of wildlife species that often become a nuisance or cause damage. Consider the following tips related to feeding wildlife:

- 1) DON'T DO IT!
- 2) place bird feeders a minimum of 35 feet from the home
- 3) purchase specific bird food for the desirable bird species and avoid mixed seed blends, corn, and other foods that may attract non-target wildlife
- 4) do not discard table scraps or leave food items outside

GARBAGE

Garbage is another leading cause of human-wildlife conflicts. Placing garbage that contains food items outside is nearly as bad as feeding wildlife. Consider the following tips to better avoid wildlife conflicts associated with garbage:

- 1) use quality trash bags and tightly tie-off or seal them
- 2) seal food items in bags or containers before placing them in trash bags
- 3) put trash bags that contain food items in secure garbage bins
- 4) keep outdoor garbage bins clean and odorless
- 5) take garbage outside the morning of pickup
- 6) always use bear-proof containers in areas where bears occur

PET FOOD

Many people have pets. Pets can be an attractant or deterrent depending on the wildlife species. The free-ranging house cat is one of the world's leading nonnative invasive species. House cats are not native to North America, and they are highly skilled, efficient predators that prey upon and kill a long list of invertebrates, fish, birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians regardless if they are hungry, wear bells, or are declawed. People that care about wildlife should keep cats indoors. House cats can be an attractant for some predators such as coyotes. Dogs are a deterrent for many mammalian wildlife species, especially deer. However, dogs often get sprayed by skunks, and small dogs can be attacked by coyotes. All house cats and small dogs should be kept indoors. Larger dogs should be kept inside or in secure outdoor enclosures to reduce wildlife conflicts. Larger dogs, however, may be kept in a fenced area around the home to deter nuisance wildlife. Consider the following tips related to pets and wildlife conflicts:

- 1) do not store pet food outside or in crawl spaces
- 2) feed pets inside or in a secure lot outside
- 3) feed pets on a schedule so that all food is consumed

CRAWL SPACE

Various wildlife species make their way into homes through the crawl space. Common wildlife that invade crawl spaces include raccoons, skunks, opossums, snakes, rats, and mice. Crawl spaces should be kept dry, clean, and neat. Consider the following tips to better avoid wildlife conflicts in crawl spaces:

- 1) do not store food items in the crawl space
- 2) do not store boxes, equipment, or other household items that may serve as cover for various wildlife
- 3) inspect the crawl space for openings and make sure it is appropriately sealed to exclude wildlife
- 4) inspect the crawl space regularly or at least twice annually for signs of wildlife

ROUTINE HOME INSPECTION

Routine home inspection for signs of wildlife activity can be dangerous. Inspections often involve crawling, climbing, lifting, ladders, tight spaces, heights, and more. It may be wise to hire a wildlife damage management professional to conduct inspections as needed. Inspection for wildlife activity is different than a typical home inspection when considering purchasing a house. View the YouTube video for details. Consider these tips when inspecting a home for wildlife activity:

- 1) inspect the home on an annual to biannual basis (inspection includes a thorough outdoor inspection, plus attic and basement inspections)
- 2) appropriately seal any gaps or openings to exclude wildlife (hardware cloth is a good option for places that require ventilation)

WINDOWS

Windows are responsible for numerous bird deaths each year. Birds collide into windows on purpose or by accident. Some birds see their reflection and attack the intruder. Most birds accidentally fly into windows, which leads to injury or death. Daytime collisions often are a result of predator-prey interactions, reflections of vegetation or the sky, or the bird can see through to the other side of the house. Nighttime collisions often occur because birds fly into lighted windows during migration. Consider the following tips to reduce window collisions:

- 1) monitor or inspect windows and treat problem areas
- 2) use shutters, screens, curtains, or blinds to reduce reflections
- 3) decals, magnets, reflectors, Acopian Bird Savers, and windsocks are noticeable, break-up window reflections, and can deter birds
- 4) turn off lights at nighttime

OCCUPANCY

Routine occupancy by humans is a deterrent for most wildlife species. However, houses that are vacant for long periods of time are more likely to be used by various wildlife that otherwise would stay away. Consider these tips to better avoid wildlife conflicts as related to occupancy:

- 1) occupy the home as much as possible
- 2) keep the home dry, clean, and neat
- 3) make sure all doors and windows are closed and secure

CONCLUSION

Human-wildlife conflicts in residential areas can be complex. Always follow local, state, and federal policies and laws when attempting to solve wildlife conflicts. If you experience a wildlife damage issue, consider contacting a professional nuisance wildlife control operator licensed by your state wildlife agency. Most state wildlife agency websites contain a list of professionals in your area. If not, contact them and ask for recommendations. Be sure to research multiple businesses and search for wildlife professionals that have a good business record. For more information on managing wildlife around the home, see *Managing Wildlife Around Your Home* (PB 1868), available through UT Extension, and the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management.



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