

Peaceful Coexistence with Urban Wildlife

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- The New Rules for Urban Living We began our history in this country as trailblazers, ranchers, farmers, and homesteaders. In the early times, we understood that we shared our land with wildlife and accordingly practiced caution; we learned how to peacefully coexist with nature. Over the last couple of centuries, we have clear-cut the forests, dammed the rivers, tunneled through the mountains, reclaimed the dessert and paved our cities. We have driven wildlife out of our concrete jungles and into the remaining wilderness to the point that, finally, the wilderness is full. Now, wildlife is adapting to our cities, just as we adapted, in the beginning, to the wilderness. The major difference is that we change the landscape to meet our needs and animals modify their behaviors to work within the landscape and our rules.
- Deer are born in the medians of interstate highways.
 - Foxes den in culverts under our driveways.
 - Coyotes den in the manmade hillsides that are created during large land developments.
 - Opossums sleep in the attic.
 - Snakes warm themselves on our sidewalk.
 - Chimney swifts, well you guessed it.
- We would do well to learn from wildlife when it comes to survival. Seventy five years ago, we never would have allowed our children to go walking in the woods without a weapon or adult supervision for defense against a bear or mountain lion or wolf. Our pets knew not to roam away from our homes because there were predators out there. Now, with concrete sidewalks, skyscrapers, fences and 24 hour a day lighting, we have become complacent. We have forgotten that wildlife exists in spite of our efforts to eliminate it. The fact is that these animals will always adapt in spite of our trapping and poisoning or our walls and fences. In an urban setting, it is not unusual to see deer, coyote, fox, raccoon, opossum, bobcat, skunk, armadillo, flying squirrels, snakes, turtles, beaver and countless species of birds.
- When we cut down the trees that provide them with shelter, they learn to adapt by using the structures that we build in place of the trees.
 - When we bury or divert their water supply, they adapt by moving into our storm drains or using our man made water features.
 - When we destroy their natural food sources, they adapt by eating our gardens, our pet's food or our pets. None of this is surprising. Given man's destruction of natural habitat, we must expect that these adaptable creatures will use what we have left for them. If we build it, they will come. Coyotes, foxes, snakes and other predators have also come to take advantage of the smorgasbord or prey animals we have invited. With prey comes predator, and that is how nature works. We must now adapt, rather than manipulate. With adaptation comes new rules.(return to top)
- Trapping/Tranquilizing and Relocating Virtually all wildlife biologists agree, and scientific studies conclude, that (1) urban wildlife is here to stay, and (2) our best course of action is to learn peaceful coexistence. Trapping is not an option for many reasons: There is no habitat left to which they may be relocated. Relocated wildlife has less than a 15% chance for survival. Relocation is a biologically unsound practice due to the possibility of cross transmission of disease from one habitat to another and also because there is not sufficient data or manpower to determine the most suitable areas in which to relocate. Relocation of any species will have a cascading effect on the balance of other species within the habitat. If you remove a predator, its prey will flourish. Remove coyotes or foxes, and you will see an abundance of rats, mice, rabbits and feral cats. Trapping of most wildlife only compounds the perceived problem because the remaining members of that species will over breed to compensate for the gap created by trapping. This results in an increase in the population. Also, the male members of the species from neighboring home ranges will aggressively compete to take over the spot left vacant. Trapping by tranquilization is not an option unless the animal is confined or in special cases of a dangerous animal that must be tranquilized and then tracked until captured. The liability of tranquilizing is too great to risk an errant dart getting into the wrong hands and causing injury or death or if the animal is a game species, there is a potential for humans eating contaminated meat. We removed the wolf and now the coyote and fox flourish. We have to learn that it is we who must adjust to nature, not nature to us? (return to top)
- Methods for Peaceful Coexistence Virtually all studies agree that we have no other viable alternative but to find ways to peacefully coexist. Given this fact, there are a number of very simple rules that will allow man and wildlife to live side-by-side without causing either significant distress. Some of these rules are not new at all. In fact, they are rules that we all lived by 50 years ago. Back then, our backyards were the woods, "in the country" was just down the road and "wilderness areas" were anywhere outside the perimeter. First, it is important to understand that wild animals are rarely a threat to humans, especially in urban environments. There are 12,980 domestic dog attacks EVERY DAY on humans in this country. How often do you hear of a wild animal attack? Our fears are misplaced. In order to peacefully coexist with our wild cousins, we only need to understand their behaviors and what to expect from them. With the knowledge provided in the species index (A-G) and (H-Z) and these new rules, you will have no reason to fear wildlife. In fact, with this knowledge, you will likely find yourself enjoying the experience of observing wildlife in your own back yard. Most of the rules listed below are common sense; those of you living in areas populated by wildlife have learned and already

practice these rules.**CHILDREN/PETS** Never allow small children or pets to go outside alone or unattended especially at dawn or dusk. Do not feed pets outside. (Simply the smell of pet food will attract wildlife) Do not allow your pets to roam free. (Free roaming cats and dogs have a 30% shorter life expectancy than those who are cared for properly by providing them with a safe outside enclosure or keeping them as inside pets). All pets should be vaccinated. When walking your pets, always put them on a leash. **HOUSE** Do not place garbage outside until the morning of pick-up. If you insist on keeping garbage outside, make sure the container is animal proof. (The lid must be raccoon proof & the top must be secured and the container should be secured from the possibility of being knocked over.) All grills should be cleaned of any food residue. Secure compost piles or bins. Remove, seal, or lock pet doors, especially from dusk to dawn. If you are concerned about wildlife in your chimney, install chimney cap. (needed only for chimney swifts) Keep gutters and downspouts clear of nesting debris. Seal all soffit, ridge, and gable vents with ½ inch hardware cloth. Cover all roof vent pipes and dryer vent pipes with proper exclusion devices. Insure that all basement vents and hatch doors are secure. **PROPERTY** Bird feeders and bird baths will attract wildlife. Fruit trees and gardens will attract wildlife. Dense ground cover offers shelter to wildlife. (Clearing shrubbery and ground cover will discourage wildlife. Clear open space exposes wildlife to predators and most wildlife will choose to remain close to areas where they can hide instantly). Any container that will hold water should be turned upside down to limit water sources and eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes. All man made liquid containers should be covered with secure lids. Do not use poisonous chemicals outside. (This is wise not only for wildlife but also for your children and pets. They also play in the grass and around the plants). (return to top) The Index of Southeastern Wildlife (A-G) and (H-Z) each provide factual information and natural behaviors on the most common species of wildlife seen in an urban setting. Each species account will also give you appropriate human responses and exclusion methods for these animals. We naturally fear the unknown but with this new information you will not be facing the unexpected. Ready your home/property for wildlife baby season. Save 1000's of wild animals and extend the life of your pet cat: The Domestic Cat and Cat Enclosures. (return to top) We hope this article has been informative and gives you food for thought. We must first AGREE TO PRESERVE the earth if we hope to LIVE TO DISAGREE on its use.