



Living with Wildlife in Illinois

Welcome to Living with Wildlife in Illinois

This information was developed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and University of Illinois Extension in order to provide residents of Illinois with information about how to coexist with Illinois' wildlife, especially in urban areas. Many species of wildlife are welcome visitors to our properties, but some animals may wear out their welcome. Urban wildlife helps us maintain our connection with nature. However, sometimes wildlife end up in places that are not safe for them or for people and pets with whom they come in contact.

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/wildlife/about.cfm>

Preventing problems with wildlife is much simpler and less aggravating than dealing with the problems after they occur. Fortunately, taking a few simple steps can help you prevent many of the most common wildlife-related problems around your home. A number of proven methods can be used to solve the problem when it cannot be prevented. Sometimes removal of an animal is necessary. By Illinois law, an animal removal permit must be requested from the IDNR before most species of wildlife may be removed from private property by the resident or a nuisance wildlife control operator. In other cases, you may have found injured or orphaned wildlife.

How to Prevent Problems with Wildlife

Whether you live in a city, suburb, or small town you can be sure that wildlife is living nearby. Many species of wildlife are welcome visitors to our properties, but some individuals quickly wear out their welcome. Preventing problems with wildlife is much simpler and less aggravating than dealing with problems after they occur. Fortunately, knowing some basic facts about wildlife and taking a few simple steps can help you prevent many of the most common wildlife-related problems.

Wildlife Basics

All creatures have three basic needs for survival: food, water, and shelter. By providing any of these resources on your property you will likely attract wildlife. Many studies have shown that people enjoy viewing wildlife. Indeed, people often landscape their properties to specifically attract wildlife. But they might not realize when they start feeding birds that they might also attract other wildlife. For example, deer love to eat birdseed, and coyotes will hunt mice that are attracted to seed under bird feeders. Wild animals are very resourceful and will make use of easy food resources such as bird feeders, improperly stored trash and pet food. Additionally, vacant buildings, unsecured chimneys, attics, crawlspaces, and the space under decks or porches are all dark, quiet locations that may be viewed by wildlife as a good place to take shelter or as a place to raise their young. It is when wildlife help themselves to crops of fruits and vegetables, eat shrubs and flowers, or decide to raise their families in attics or under decks that people find themselves looking for help in dealing with problem wildlife.

The spatial arrangement of food, water, and shelter will dictate how many animals live in a given area. For example, homes located near less-developed areas such as forest preserves, parks, golf courses, and rivers or lakes will have higher concentrations of wildlife than those in more urbanized areas. Railroad tracks, power line rights-of-way, and roadsides all make convenient travel lanes for wildlife, making it easier for them to gain access to your neighborhood. Older neighborhoods with mature trees and landscaping may be at higher risk for wildlife related problems than new developments because there may be more cover available. However, neighborhoods near new development may also see an increase in wildlife numbers as animals are displaced from their natural habitat.

Not all wildlife problems can be prevented. However, learning about wildlife, knowing what resources attract wildlife, and taking steps to prevent wildlife damage are keys to reducing human-wildlife conflicts. The best approach to managing wildlife is a strategy of prevention based on removing resources and using exclusion techniques and repellents and frightening devices.

Exclude Wildlife from Your Home

It is easier to keep animals out of your home than to deal with an animal that has decided to den inside or underneath your home. Regularly inspect the exterior of your home. Siding or roofing materials that have suffered weather damage or deterioration make it easier for animals to gain access. The following list provides tips on how to prevent animals from getting into your home.

Fireplace or Furnace Chimney The best way to keep animals out of the chimney is to install a commercial chimney cap. These caps are secured to the chimney with bolts or screws. A less expensive alternative is to use 1/2" × 1/2" mesh hardware cloth. Leave a peak over the flue to prevent leaves and sticks from accumulating. To exclude wildlife, the hardware cloth must be secured tightly. Do not use window-screening material as it will clog with soot and other debris causing a fire hazard.

Attic Exhaust Fan Opening From inside the attic, cover the attic exhaust fan opening with 1/2" × 1/2" mesh hardware cloth and staple into place. To make the enclosure more secure, overlap the edges of the hardware cloth with 1" × 2" pieces of lumber and nail or screw the lumber into the attic rafters.

Attic End Louvers (Vents) and Soffit Vents Cover the inside of the vent with 1/2" × 1/2" mesh hardware cloth.

Roof, Soffit and Fascia Inspect twice a year for signs of damage, paying close attention to areas where gables or dormers meet the roof line. Water damage can soften wood making it easy for animals to create holes or enlarge existing holes. Repair damage promptly after making sure the animal is not inside.

Porches and Decks For porches or decks built within 2 feet of the ground, dig a trench at least 10" deep around the decks perimeter. Attach 1/2" × 1/2" mesh hardware cloth or 1" × 1" welded wire from the top of the outside joists to the bottom of the trench. Leave 6 to 8" of wire at the bottom and bend it out at a 90o angle. Fill the trench with soil or rocks. Add lattice or other cover for aesthetics.

Window Wells Cover the window well with a commercial grate or plastic cover.

Repellents Repellents are a valuable management tool. They can help protect particular areas of your yard or valuable plants. The two most common types of repellents are contact (taste) repellents and area (odor) repellents. The effectiveness of contact repellents is increased if you use them only on selected plants in your landscape, leaving other food sources available. Be sure to read and follow the product labels because many contact repellents are regulated as pesticides. Area repellents are typically not as effective, but may be useful in some situations. Do not use home remedies such as mothballs or broken glass as these can pose a threat to children or pets.

Frightening Devices Frightening devices can play a role in wildlife damage management. Frightening devices typically use visual or auditory stimuli to scare animals or birds from an area. Examples include pyrotechnics, gas exploders, guard animals, strobe lights, helium filled balloons with eyespots, owl kites, reflective objects like Mylar® tape, and distress calls. These devices are typically not long-term solutions. Some techniques may work on particular animals or for short periods of time, but once the animal becomes used to the device and figures out that it does not pose a threat the device will no longer be effective. To improve the effectiveness of these products try regularly moving visual or sound devices to different locations. Effectiveness can also be improved by using multiple devices or techniques.

Reduce Food and Water for Wildlife

- Do not feed squirrels, raccoons, deer, or other wildlife.
- If you feed birds, install baffles on the bird feeders or use feeders with weight-activated treadles to keep squirrels out. Do not allow bird seed to accumulate on the ground where it can attract rodents, raccoons and opossums. Using

thistle seed instead of sunflower seeds or corn will help you attract song birds and may reduce the likelihood of attracting squirrels, opossums, or raccoons. Safflowers may be used instead of sunflowers since squirrels do not seem to like safflowers.

- Feed pets indoors when possible. If pets must be fed outside, bring food dishes in overnight and clean up any spilled food.
- Keep garbage stored properly. Use solid trash containers with secure lids. Place trash containers in an area where they cannot be easily knocked over or build a frame to hold them upright.
- Do not place food scraps in your garden. If you compost your food scraps make sure they are not accessible.
- Clean your outdoor grill regularly.
- If you have fruit trees in your yard, harvest or dispose of all ripe fruit.
- Use fencing or other enclosures to keep rabbits, voles, and deer from nibbling on garden plants or landscaping. Keep in mind that the openings in the wire fence must be small enough to keep out the species you are trying to exclude, and in most cases a portion of the enclosure must be buried underground to prevent animals from digging under it.

Reduce Shelter for Wildlife

- Stack firewood away from buildings or fences. (This helps reduce the chances of invasion by termites as well). Stack firewood on a frame that keeps wood at least 2 feet above ground. Only store as much firewood as you will use in a reasonable amount of time.
- Remove tall grass, brush piles, or debris from your yard.
- Remove dead trees.
- Deny access to your roof by trimming nearby tree branches. There should be a minimum of 10 feet between tree limbs and your home since tree squirrels can jump distances of up to 10 feet.
- Check your home regularly to make sure it is in good repair. Wildlife often enter homes through gaps in the structure, via chimneys, soffit vents, or attic exhaust fan openings or vents, or through damaged roofs. Prevent access under decks or foundations.
- Prevent access to abandoned or infrequently used buildings.

Trapping and Removal

- By Illinois law, a property owner or tenant needs a Nuisance Animal Removal Permit to trap and remove most species of wildlife. If a Nuisance Animal Removal Permit is necessary, you can request a permit from an Illinois Department of Natural Resources District Wildlife Biologist. The District Wildlife Biologist will provide guidance on appropriate trapping and disposal methods, but will not trap the animal for you. Property damage by wildlife or a threat to human health or safety by wildlife must be demonstrated before a permit will be issued. Animals that are trapped by a property owner or tenant must be released onto the property from which they were captured, relocated to another property, or humanely euthanized. If an animal is relocated, prior written permission must be obtained from the landowner of the property where the animal will be released. Animals may not be released in state, county, or municipal parks, nature preserves, or natural areas.
- If you need assistance with trapping an animal, you may prefer to hire a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator (NWCO) to trap and remove the animal for you. By state law, NWCOs must euthanize all skunks, and raccoons must be released on the same property where they were trapped or euthanized.

Do I Need a Permit?

There are different protections for different species in Illinois. Please contact a local Illinois Department of Natural Resources [District Wildlife Biologist](#) if you need to request a Nuisance Wildlife Removal Permit.

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