

Raccoons in the City

Procyon lotor

Identification:

Raccoons are fairly unique looking, to identify look for the area of black fur around the eyes, the raccoon “mask”. Rounded ears are bordered in white. Long overcoat is gray to brown. They have a distinctive “hunched over” walk and move quickly when startled. They are rarely out during the day, occasionally they can be seen sleeping high up in tree branches.



Natural history:

Natives to North America, raccoons were relatively rare in the early 1900's. Urbanization, loss of top predators, and expansion of agriculture led to population increases. Raccoons are highly adaptable, and need access to water and trees to successfully move into an area. The number of raccoons in an area is directly related to how much food is available. Since they'll eat almost anything they have been able to expand throughout North and Central America, Europe and Asia.

Diet:

Raccoons are omnivores, and will eat just about anything. Insects make up the biggest part of their diet. They'll also snack on worms, fruit, nuts, salamanders, frogs, eggs, fish, rodents, pet food and garbage. Raccoons have more nerve endings in their sensitive paws than other mammals, and will use paws to feel if something is potentially edible. Dunking items in water increases the sensitivity.

Breeding:

Raccoons mate between January and March, giving birth after 63-65 days to litters of two to seven kits. Kits are born blind and helpless in a tree den, their eyes open at 18 to 24 days of age, and they are weaned after 70 days. By 20 weeks old the kits regularly forage with their mother at night and continue to stay in the den with her. The kits remain with their mother through their first winter, becoming independent early the following spring.



Behavior in an urban environment:

Raccoons are nocturnal, typically avoiding contact with people and pets. Curiosity and intelligence leads to a lot of investigation of new things, and they'll often check out yards late at night. They remember where they have found food in the past and will check areas regularly, fish and snails in backyard ponds are popular and easy for them to eat. Raccoons may become aggressive when defending a food source, especially in the fall. One of the top causes of mortality is starvation in the winter, so in fall they spend a majority of their time trying to fatten up and aggressively go after food. Raccoons are more likely to fight for food than most urban wildlife species, they are adapted for fast running, and if they cannot readily escape up a vertical surface they will fight confrontational pets. They are capable of extremely coordinated actions, and can easily open garbage cans, coolers and even food containers. They are highly intelligent and have been known to take advantage of dog doors, and enter homes looking for food.

Benefits:

In urban habitats raccoons will prey on rodent nests and geese eggs, helping control populations. While sightings may be rare, night time wildlife watchers will see amazing examples of ingenuity and behavior from these intelligent and adaptable animals.

Danger from raccoons:

Raccoons will avoid conflict with people, unless they are cornered. Pets are rarely attacked, except when there may be direct competition for a food source. Removing food from yards and keeping pets in at night is the best way to protect pets from injury.

Disease: Rabies can be transmitted from raccoons to pets or people. Only 1 raccoon has tested positive for rabies in CO since 1963. Raccoons can suffer from both feline and canine distemper and can transmit it to unvaccinated pets. Do not let your pets interact with wildlife.

What to do when living with raccoons

Raccoons can move into attics or fireplaces when searching for dens to give birth. They do not den year round, and when the kits are old enough (8-10 weeks) they will leave.

They are extremely intelligent, and will move sooner if made uncomfortable. Be prepared to be persistent for 2-3 days if you need them to leave before the kits can leave on their own.

Raccoons in the chimney: Be aware that in the spring or summer young may be present.

They usually do not enter home or cause damage and will leave when kits are big enough.

1. **Never light a fire with live animals in the chimney.**
2. Reduce access to roof top by removing overhanging branches
3. Leave flu open, if there are no babies and when animal is out, install a commercial cap of sheet metal and heavy screen over the top.
4. If unable to wait until babies are old enough to move, place bowl of ammonia in chimney with flu open. Mother should move babies in a few days.

Never feed raccoons.

They have great long term memories, and will come to expect food in certain locations. Pets can be considered direct competition for food.

1. Feed pets indoors.
2. Keep garbage and compost in securely closed cans or inside until pick up.
3. Clean up fruit that's fallen to the ground.
4. Clean under bird feeders and barbeque grills regularly.

Sharing spilled cat food



Raccoons will eventually get used to a dispersal technique- be prepared to use several.

Make your yard unattractive to raccoons.

1. Play radio
2. Use scarecrows, plastic or cloth streamers, and plastic windmills.
3. Install motion activated lights around home.
4. Turn on lights before going outside.
5. Leave noisemakers on hand to scare away animals in yard. Whistles, soda cans with pebbles, aluminum pie pans, tin can lids, horns or even clap and yell.
6. Spray with a hose.

Raccoon repellants:

(all below items are environmentally safe and will not harm children or animals)

1. Cayenne pepper
2. *Repel*® Granules, *Boundary*® and *Dog-Gone*®. Commercial dog and cat repellants, available at most pet stores or garden centers.

3. Hot Pepper Repellent Recipe: ingredients: yellow onion, jalapeno pepper, 1 tbsp cayenne. Boil 20 minutes in 2 qt water. Cool, strain and apply with spray bottle. Repeat use as needed.
4. Mechanical Repellants
 - a. Scarecrow® by Contech is a motion-activated sprinkler.
 - b. Electronic Pest Control: 0700 Deluxe Dual Speaker Pest Repellent®

Why don't we remove the raccoons from our neighborhoods?

Relocation is rarely recommended:

1. Raccoons will usually travel back to their original territory.
2. Raccoons may be killed by or chase off by the resident raccoons whose territory they are moved to.
3. Raccoons released with offspring only continue to care for young after relocation 50% of the time, increases offspring mortality.
4. If all resources and access still there, new animals will quickly move back into territory

Colorado Division of Wildlife allows relocation of raccoons within 10 miles of the capture location, with **advance notice** to the Division in an area of suitable raccoon habitat and with permission of the land owner or manager of the relocation site.

Lethal removal:

1. If all attractants and access still there, animals quickly move back into territory
2. Raccoons will have increased litter size with more open territory, resulted in overall larger population.

Resources

Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raccoon>

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