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IMPORTANT NOTICE: A.S.K. has provided our species specific tips based off of years of field experience and reported research; we are NOT in the business of wildlife damage control and as such, are not profiting from the recommendations provided. These tips may not be all-inclusive and we recommend discussing your specific issue with A.S.K.'s wildlife biologist **(877-596-7776)**, or your local *humane* wildlife damage control specialist for further details. Using a variety of the tactics provided usually equates to the highest success rate. All actions must adhere to Michigan law.

RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) NUISANCE TIPS

By: Sophia DiPietro



Photo credit: Sue Good



Photo credit: David Manski

Understanding Raccoon Behavior

- **Omnivorous** (eat both plants & animals); not very efficient hunters/predators which means that if they spot an easy meal in your yard, they are going to go for it! In urban settings especially, raccoons are opportunistic, scavengers. If you have a garden, are feeding stray cats, have bird feeders, fruit-bearing shrubs or trees, or garbage canisters that don't seal well allowing food smells to emit, you will likely have a raccoon (or other wild mammal) visit. Raccoons have good memories. They will remember where the food source was, and continue to seek it out until you alter the conditions that baited them in.
- **Nocturnal:** however, it is possible to see raccoons scavenging for food during daylight hours, especially if they have a nest of babies.
- Raccoons do not hibernate, however will go into a state of daily torpor (sleeping for an extended period of time or inactivity) when deep snow hits, or temperatures plummet.
- Breeding season is February-June, with most mating occurring in March. One litter per year typically. Litter size ranges from 1-7 (typically 4) individuals and young are weaned at 2 months of age, but remain with their mother through their first winter. **Caution and avoidance to separating non-weaned babies from their adult counterparts should always be exercised. Rehabilitation is time-**

intensive and expensive. Most local rehabbers become full by early-summer, and refuse services. Therefore it is ideal if the problem can be dealt with without orphaning the young.

Read Below for A.S.K. Tips! ↓

Quick Environmentally-Friendly Tips:

- **Epsom Salt:** Sprinkle a few tablespoons around your problem areas; raccoons don't like the taste! Epsom salts are not harmful to plants, the environment or rodents. Repeat after rains.
- **McCormick Black Pepper:** Sprinkle in problem areas. Raccoons have a great sense of smell and they dislike the smell of pepper. Repeat after rains. **Note:** Squirrels will also be repelled.
- **Peppermint Oil, Cotton Balls, Sheer Energy Panty Hose:** Mint smells deter raccoons; douse a few cotton balls with peppermint oil and put inside the foot portion of panty hose. Hang the hose in the problem area. **Note:** Squirrels will also be repelled.
- **Newspaper:** Raccoons don't like walking over crumply/rustling newspaper-*reportedly* (we've never tried this method). This method works great for keeping raccoons out of sweet corn. Place crumpled paper in between rows (so it shouldn't blow away).
- **½ cup Cayenne + 1 tablespoon liquid soap +1 pint of H2O:** mix and let stand 24 hours. Spray ears of corn. Raccoons love corn and may be attracted to it otherwise.
- **Radio:** play it all night long in the problem area-preferably rock music or talk radio. Cover radio with Ziploc bag if concerned about moisture damage.
- **Bungy cord & Lysol/Tabasco Sauce:** Use the cord to keep garbage lids securely shut. Spray Lysol or sprinkle Tabasco sauce on lid to add more deterrence.
- **Keep pet food contained and not outside!** Feeding cats or other animals will also attract raccoons.

Home Invasions

1. Make sure to verify the source of the noise or damage. Keep in mind: raccoons using attics or chimneys usually begin to make noise at dusk since they are most active during the night. If you are hearing most disturbances during the day, consider squirrels (except flying squirrels which are also nocturnal) or rodents.
2. Is it breeding season (February-June)? If so, we want to encourage you to AVOID band-aid solutions to removal, like live-trapping the mother. Not only is live-trapping an ineffective action, doing so will orphan babies in your attic, chimney etc. Baby raccoons are born blind and helpless, but do make chitter-chatter that you will likely hear. If they are not causing severe damage, waiting 8-9 weeks until they can follow their mother out, is the best option.
3. Keep your pets inside; a scared raccoon is not going to want to leave the safety of your attic or chimney if a dog is waiting outside. You may be able to safely allow your dog near the problem location from the INSIDE, which may incline the raccoon to exit when it smells the dog's scent. Care should always be taken to minimize injury to you and your pets; wildlife, especially when stressed and scared, can be dangerous.

Evictions

How to Get Them Out: Typically the mother raccoon will lead her family out as soon as they are capable of following her out (at 8-9 weeks from birth). Monitor the situation and immediately have plans in place to seal any entrances once they leave. Make sure to check the fireplace flue. Its horizontal smoke shelf is a common place for raccoons to hide out. You may also consider baiting the family out with a trail of smelly cat or dog food.

Chimney Exclusion: Place a dog urine-soaked rag under a closed damper. Start this activity a little prior to dusk each night. If you don't have a dog, ask your local shelter/humane society for help. They have plenty of dogs on-site, and many times dogs have accidents inside their kennels! Play a radio (talk radio or loud music work best) in the fireplace. Continue to play throughout the day to ensure that the site becomes undesirable. Hang a light up or down into the chimney. Avoid driving nocturnal animals out during the day when they are not normally active--they will be more likely to be aggressive and confused. Never use smoke or fire to get them to leave; not only is this cruel, but often times the animals end up in your fireplace.

Attic/Home Exclusion: Determine precisely where entry/exit points are; voids between floor boards, crawl spaces, basements and attics provide good shelter. Sprinkle flour on the floor in areas you suspect activity to confirm appearance and paths. In areas in which raccoon waste is noticeable, wear protective mask, clothing and gloves to avoid exposure to roundworm eggs. Open nearby windows or doors, start playing the radio just before dusk in the area you think that the raccoon is near. Keep lights on to make the site uncomfortable; remove hiding places. Strobe, or flashing lights work well. This should disturb the raccoon enough to encourage it to exit. Remember, raccoons will re-visit sites that attract them. You can save yourself money and avoid calling "pest" removal services by making sure that the site is no longer appealing.

Porch Exclusion: Use above mentioned tactics. Install a porch skirt once all animals are evicted.

Yard Exclusion: You cannot feed stray animals and expect raccoons to stay away. Likewise, if you feed your dog outside, and food is left over, a raccoon will be drawn to it. Lawns with sprinkler systems on regularly may also encourage raccoons. The moisture brings earthworms and grubs to the surface, providing an easy food source. If you have raccoons ripping your sod in small areas, placing a hot sauce repellent with capsaicin may ward them off.

Garden Exclusion: Veggies and fruits in your garden entice raccoons in. Use a battery-powered radio, and keep a talk radio channel on all night in garden. Raccoons are smart. The radio method may only work for a short time and should be rotated with other methods for best results. Single strand electric fencing can be used when damage is considerable. Ammonia-soaked rags can also be placed in problem areas outside (they should not be used inside); the strong scent will discourage activity. Human hair can be removed from hairbrushes and placed in onion bags. Dangle the bags around the problem site; wildlife will avoid the area!

Bird Feeder Exclusion: The best way to eliminate any wildlife conflict is to eliminate the underlying problem, the attractant. If raccoons are climbing into your bird feeders, you can encircle the feeder poles with stove pipe (two sections), then smear axle grease on the stove pipe. You have to make sure that the bird feeder isn't under or close to branches or any other source that might allow them to climb down to the feeder. If raccoons are eating bird seed on the ground, we suggest fencing around the perimeter of the problem area, or removing excess bird seed daily or a chemical repellent. We recommend **GET-AWAY by Hava-hart (manufacturer Intagra, Inc.)** whose main ingredients are capsaicin and oil of mustard. This product also deters squirrels. This can be ordered at <http://www.havahart.com/store/animal-repellents/5300>. Ace Hardware stores should also be able to order this product for you. This product is NOT made of "predator urine", which is extracted inhumanely from other species. Placing a radio at the site overnight over the course of days, may discourage raccoons from approaching. This method may cause them to change their behaviors and seek out another food source. Placing an ammonia soaked rag in a bag with small holes will allow strong odor to emit and may ward raccoons from certain areas. Urine soaked clumping cat litter will also achieve the same effect.

Ornamental Pond Exclusion: Raccoons will be attracted to water sources, especially those that are filled with goldfish. If your pond is at least 3 feet deep in areas, you should provide fish hide-outs, either out of plastic cylinders, or cement cinder blocks that have holes in them. Providing hiding spots for your fish is the surest way to prevent them from becoming a raccoon meal. Above mentioned tactics may also be employed.

Prevention & Once the Intruders Have Left: Once you think they have left, sprinkle Cayenne pepper around the entrance area, or use 2 Tbs. of Tabasco sauce to 1 qt. of water, sprayed or painted around the entrance area. Before sealing the entry, tack a sheet of plastic over the entry and check to see if animals have broken through. Be sure to leave the light and radio on until there is no sign of activity. Seal entrance areas. Heavy material like sheet metal or wire mesh must be used to keep raccoons out. If wire mesh is used, at minimum 16-gauge material (~0.06 inches in diameter) is recommended. Use chimney caps and/or screens. A professional chimneysweep may be required for proper installation. Remove tree branches or shrubbery that may provide access to the problem areas. Keep locking lids on garbage cans or lids with bungee cords if they don't seal strongly shut. If you plastic bags that do not have a wildlife proof container, you may consider dripping bleach onto the bag, or ammonia (NEVER both!) to keep animals away. Remove all pet food from outside. **Remember, make the attraction undesirable: strong scents, loud noise and bright lights will help solve your problem.**

WARNING: Trapping will NOT solve your problem; there are plenty more raccoons to fill the spaces of those that were trapped and removed prior. *A.S.K. IS licensed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment for humane trapping and relocation services. Humane trapping should be your last resort since it doesn't really solve the problem!* If you have a professional say that they will trap the entire family, they should be able to prove that they are relocating the entire family, and not just killing all of them. It is common practice for many wildlife nuisance companies, to kill what they trap, albeit the fact that they often like to "sugarcoat" what their actions will be to make the caller (you) more comfortable and at ease with their service.

A Final Reminder: Wildlife are constantly facing reductions to their natural habitat due to human development. They don't really want to be your neighbor, but when they realize that you provide lots of free shelter and food, of course they will stay and adapt to the urban lifestyle. Please exercise sound judgment and patience when employing mitigation techniques. Being humane will solve your problem for the long-term!

Additional Resources:

- Check out the online, interactive "Intruder Excluder" to help solve your nuisance wildlife issue! <http://support.mspca.org/intruderexcluder/>
- How to Make an Outdoor Cat (or other animal) Raccoon-proof Feeder: <http://thewildones.net/raccoons.htm>
- Detailed Raccoon Factsheet <http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/raccoon-fact-sheet.pdf>
- Visit All Species Kinship (A.S.K.) for injured/orphaned/nuisance help: www.allspecieskinship.org

Portions adapted from: Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living With Wildlife, By John Hadidan Sue Good, Michigan licensed wildlife rehabilitator