

Wildlife Express!

Volume 24/Issue 7

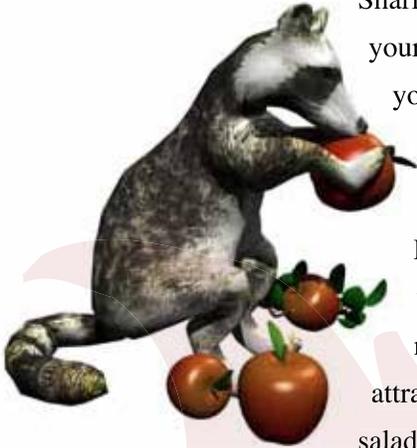
Urban Wildlife

March 2011

Wild in the City



Living with Wildlife



Sharing your neighborhood with wildlife can be really neat! You can sharpen your observation skills and learn about animal behavior. Keeping lists of what you see can be a fun hobby. If you enjoy art, taking photographs or drawing and painting wildlife is a lot of fun. Living near wildlife can also be a challenge.

Food is one of the main reasons wildlife live in town. This includes food that we might provide by accident or on purpose. Any kind of food left outdoors might be eaten by wildlife. Do you feed your pets outside? Leftovers will attract raccoons and skunks. A garden full of vegetables might look like a giant salad to a deer. When animals find food somewhere, they often return to see if they can find more. And they like to bring their friends. This is why one raccoon that ate your cat's food last week turned into six raccoons this week. If you do not bring your cat food inside, you could attract a lot of raccoons in a short time.

So, what's the big deal if the raccoons eat the cat food? Our food and our pet's food are not always good for wildlife. Some of the foods we think are fine for wildlife to eat cannot be digested by wild animals. They also may not have the right nutrients. This can make the animals sick and weak. Feeding wildlife can also increase the spread of disease. When we feed wildlife, the animals sometimes gather in large groups. If one of them is sick, it is much more likely that the others will get sick too. It is kind of like the sick kid who came to school and gave his cold to everyone in your class.

Another important reason not to feed wildlife is safety. Animals that become used to people are no longer afraid of people. They can become aggressive. The people trying to feed wildlife can get chased, bitten, kicked, or worse. Wildlife is called "wild" for a reason. Even if they live in town, they are not like our pets. They are wild creatures that are adapted to their way of life, not ours.

We can both enjoy our urban wildlife and prevent problems. Help urban wildlife by bringing pet food indoors so wildlife cannot find it. Give your parents a hand putting a fence around your garden to keep the deer out. Plant native flowers, shrubs and trees to provide wildlife with natural food sources. Put your bird feeders indoors at night. Keep your trash in the garage until trash pick-up. A few simple steps can help us enjoy our wild neighbors, and keep the "wild" in urban wildlife.





Looking For Wildlife Signs

Urban wildlife is all around us, but sometimes we don't actually see the animals. Sometimes we just see evidence that they have been around. Below is a checklist of animals that often live around our homes. See how many tracks you can find around your neighborhood.



Red Squirrel



Raccoon



Coyote

California Quail



Canada Goose



Deer



Red Fox

Deer Mouse



Bobcat



Skunk

* Tracks are not to size.



WILD in the City

Dayshift

Most of us are creatures of the day. We do our best work during the day and use the night to sleep and refresh our bodies. Animals that are active during the day are called diurnal (die-UR-nal) animals.

Just like us, diurnal animals are really made to get things done when the sun is shining. What adaptations do diurnal animals have? Well, compared to nocturnal animals, diurnal animals rely much more on their sense of sight. Their eyes are not as large as nocturnal animals' eyes, but diurnal animals have vision that is much more finely tuned. They can see small details and see at longer distances than nocturnal animals. During the day, it is more difficult for a predator to sneak up on its prey. Many diurnal animals need speed to catch their food. This may be the reason why hawks and falcons can fly faster than owls. Diurnal animals also tend to have colors that camouflage them a bit better than some nocturnal animals. Being able to blend in during the day is important for animals that need to hide from predators and protect themselves.

Some animals are most active at dawn and dusk. These animals are called crepuscular (kre-PUS-ku-lar) animals. Mule deer are crepuscular animals. Can you think of other animals that are diurnal or crepuscular?

Nightshift

Do you know anyone who works during the night? Some doctors, nurses, and police work the nightshift. Some animals also work the nightshift. These animals are called nocturnal animals. As twilight deepens into the forests and fields, nocturnal animals begin to come out.

Working the nightshift can pose lots of problems for animals. These animals, like all animals, need to find food and keep away from predators. Why do you they choose nighttime to make their living? A lot of it has to do with competition during the daytime. If all the animals were trying to make their living during the day, it might be pretty crowded. Another reason might be that the animal is trying to keep out of the heat. This is especially true for desert animals. It might just be too hot during the day. Wildlife in towns and cities often come out at night to avoid us! Many wild animals are secretive and don't much care for being around humans.

One of the most obvious problems for nighttime animals is the lack of light. Many nocturnal animals have specialized eyes to help them see in the dark. Other animals, like some bats and shrews, rely on sound and specialized hearing. They use echolocation to help them find their food. Scorpions have fine hairs on their legs that they use to sense vibrations. Other animals that work the nightshift include crickets, owls, raccoons, skunks and mice. If you worked the nightshift, what special features would you need?

Let Them Be

Spring is a time for renewal. It's a time to get out of the house and explore all the wonders of nature. Walks, bike rides and fishing trips may take us closer to wildlife. You may see baby animals. It's a true sign that spring has arrived.

When you hear people talking about enjoying animals, remember it is especially important that we leave animals alone. Let them do the things they need to do to survive. Getting too close to wild animals might stress them and cause them to die.

As humans, we have an urge to take care of things we think are helpless, especially "cute" animals, like deer fawns or ducklings. If you see a baby animal, don't assume it has been abandoned by its mother. Most of the time, this isn't the case. Mothers often leave their young hidden while they go away to eat. If the mother stayed



close to her baby, she could actually draw the attention of a predator. You may have scared the mother away. She will return once "danger" has passed.

If you know that an animal is orphaned because the mother has died, call your local Fish and Game office. They will take the animal to a wildlife rehabilitator. Chances are if you take an animal home, it will die. Caring for a wild animal is not the same as caring for a pet. They need special foods, cages and treatments. Wildlife rehabilitators are specially trained and licensed to care for them.

Wildlife should not be handled, fed, chased or disturbed. If an animal will let you close enough to pick it up, it may be sick. Do not pick up a wild animal – dead or alive. Wild animals are just that – wild! They survive on their own just fine without any help from people. Wild animals are unique and wonderful, view them from a distance and leave wildlife in the wild.



Home, Sweet, Home



When you think of your community do you think of raccoons or deer or foxes? You probably don't. We think of our towns as places we live, not wildlife. Urban dwellers are often quite surprised to see deer in a local park, raccoon tracks in the snow, or a hawk in the backyard. In fact, many wild animals have made our home, their home too.

Wildlife can live in town if there is good habitat. As long as food, water, and shelter can be found in an appropriate



space, some kind of animal will be able to survive. Many of our communities provide quite a bit of habitat for wildlife. Think about your own community. You know the park where you ride your bike with your friends? This is an example of habitat for urban wildlife. What about the river that runs through your town? How about your backyard? Backyards with a variety of flowers, trees, and shrubs can provide a small habitat for wildlife. Even something as simple as putting up a bird feeder or bird bath can make your yard an attractive habitat. Does your school have an outdoor classroom or garden? That could be wildlife habitat, too!

Some urban wildlife is very familiar. Does your community have squirrels? They are urban wildlife. How about birds? A wide variety of birds easily adapt to living in town. From tiny hummingbirds and small songbirds to great horned owls and Canada geese, birds are all around us. Many kinds of urban wildlife are nocturnal.

While we sleep, they are busy trying to survive. When morning arrives, they are ready to find shelter and rest. Deer, raccoons, foxes, skunks, and coyotes

live among us, but often go unseen. If you are observant, you can find the tracks and scat they leave behind.

The kinds and number of wildlife we see in our communities can sometimes depend on the time of year. For example, a winter with a lot of snow and cold can bring deer into towns. They are looking for food and shelter. Once the weather improves the deer leave. Sometimes a few of them stay in town and become urban wildlife. Wildlife like foxes and coyotes eat some of the other animals that live in town. Squirrels, rabbits, and small rodents all make a good meal for a hungry fox. Deer and rabbits feed on plants. Great horned owls eat skunks that wander through neighborhoods---yuck! Glad something eats a skunk!

While we may see wildlife in town, it is important to remember that urban wildlife is still wild. They are not tame like your pets. Enjoy them from a distance. You are lucky to live in a "wild" community!



Lending a Helping Hand



Seeing wildlife in and around where we live can be a thrill. At times, it can also be hazardous – for both wildlife and people. How do we help wildlife around our homes live a healthy life?

One problem we are often faced with is wildlife on our roadways. People sometimes build roads across wildlife paths. Wild animals, like deer, don't spend the whole year in one area. They migrate between summer and winter homes. Often it is the snow that forces deer to migrate out of the mountains. They will often use the same routes or paths year after year. When a migration route goes across a road, problems occur. Deer are hit by cars, and accidents happen when people swerve to miss deer. Deer and people are sometimes killed. To help avoid deer and car collisions, wildlife underpasses can be built. A tunnel is made under the road for the deer to use. Large fences are built along the road to keep deer off the road and help them find the underpass. Sometimes bridges are made for wildlife to walk across the road. Underpasses and bridges have saved many wild animals and people from dying in a collision.

If you notice that wildlife habitat is disappearing around your home, you can help by making habitat in your yard. Even a pot of flowers can help a hummingbird or butterfly. If you decide to turn your backyard into a bird or butterfly haven, there are some things to keep in mind. You should plant native Idaho plants whenever possible. Wildlife are adapted to native plants, and these plants supply them with the best food and shelter. The Idaho Native Plant Society (www.idahonativeplants.org) has information about using native plants in the resource section of their webpage. In the wild, plants usually don't grow in straight lines. So put your plants in clumps and make sure you have a mixture of tall trees, lower shrubs and plants that grow on the ground. Birds will appreciate chokecherries or other bushes that have berries. Don't forget the water! A fresh supply of water will attract all sorts of wildlife. A fancy birdbath is not needed. A pie plate is a wonderful place for a bird to get a drink and take a bath. Just remember to change the water at least every two days to keep mosquitoes from hatching.

These are just a few examples of how we can help wildlife that live around our homes. Can you think of other ways to lend a helping hand?



“Dialogue for Kids”

Tuesday, March 15th

2:00 PM MST/1:00 PM PST



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Wildlife Around Us Word Search

L R O T O A H B S P L X I R E
R E A E S U O M Y O E A E T O
K Z R B D U C K W F F E O R W
M J Z R B S M L C X D Y X L L
N H I J I I Y H I I O Q N K O
O C A H F U T B H C U W E G M
O F T W A S Q U J A B B C L C
C E K D K K U S I E E A L L Y
C E S V X U T L B O B C A T E
A T F O O N W D O Q M A P I Z
R O N U O K Y V C Y I G M F J
X A I T T G Y U H D A Y T G O
B O B O Q D U R Y G G D Q N R
G B O D O R A W S P K O M T P
F D R I R Y H E M M U M F T Y

WORDS

BOBCAT
COYOTE
DEER
DUCK
FOX
GOOSE
HAWK
MOUSE
OWL
QUAIL
RABBIT
RACCOON
ROBIN
SKUNK
SQUIRREL

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If you have a letter, poem or question for *Wildlife Express*, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to the address printed above! Look for printable copies of *Wildlife Express* on the web at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>