

# Wildlife Express

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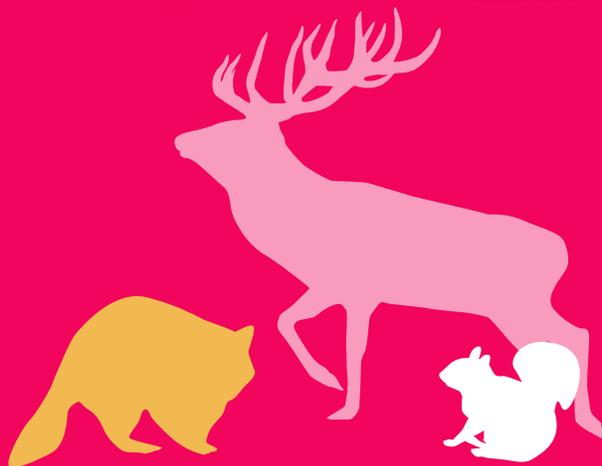
January 2020

# Urban Wildlife

Photo CCBY Emily Palmer for IDFG

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# Wild in the City



## 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. Aren't you 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!

# 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 may invite 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 the 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. 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.

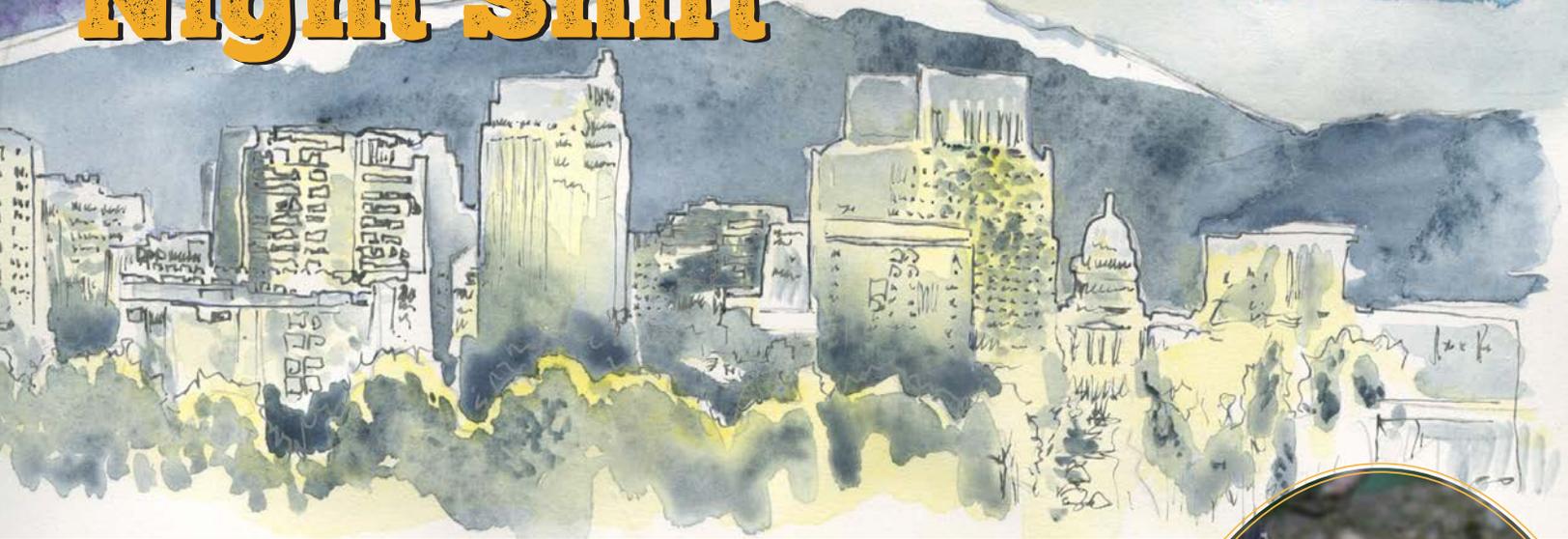
Help urban wildlife by bringing pet food indoors so wildlife cannot find it. Build a fence around your garden to keep the deer out, and plant native flowers, shrubs and trees to provide wildlife with natural food sources. Put your bird feeders indoors at night. Keep your trash in the garage until trash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



Photos top to bottom:

Raccoon CCBY Bruce Fingerhood on Flickr. Raccoon family CCBY Tracie Hall on Flickr. Skunks by Steve Juvetson on Flickr.

# Night Shift



**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 think they chose 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?**

Photos top to bottom:

Great Horned Owl © Tom Munson for IDFG. Red Fox at the MK Nature Center CCBY IDFG. Illustration CCBY Mary Johnson for IDFG.

# Day Shift



**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?



Photos top to bottom:  
Mule Doe outside Washington Group offices. CCBY Roger Phillips for IDFG. Canada geese at park CCBY IDFG. Mule Doe gathered in Cascade, ID and highway signs. CCBY Mary Johnson, IDFG. Illustration CCBY Mary Johnson for IDFG.

# 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.



1. Deer

2. Raccoon

3. Striped Skunk

4. Squirrel

5. Canada goose

6. Deer Mouse

7. Fox

8. Coyote

9. Bobcat

10. California Quail



Tracks are not to scale

Photos top to bottom: Bobcat CCBY Valerie on Flickr. Canada goose CCBY IDFG. Coyote CCBY emdot on Flickr. Squirrel CCBY Emily Palmer, IDFG. Red fox MK Nature Center CCBY Joe Peterson, IDFG. Mule Deer CCBY John Gatens, IDFG. California Quail CCBY Phillip Cowan on Flickr. Deer mouse CCBY Andrew Cannizzaro on Flickr. Striped Skunk CCBY Dan Dzurisin on Flickr. Raccoon CCBY IDFG. Tracks CCBY IDFG.

# Be Outside!

# VIEWING WILDLIFE



**Living with wildlife in the neighborhood can be fascinating.** You can learn a lot about animal behavior and how these animals live their lives. It can also give you the chance to practice being a good wildlife viewer.

**There's no doubt that seeing a wild animal in your yard is exciting!** However, you don't want to scare or disturb the animal. So what do you do? The best thing is to stay indoors. Use your house as a huge wildlife viewing blind. Stay quiet and move slowly as you approach a window. A pair of binoculars can really give you a good view. Help your family members stay quiet and still as you watch the animal. Make sketches or take photos of the animal or write some notes about what it is doing.

**Using a blind and being still and quiet are good skills you can use no matter where you watch wildlife.** Many wildlife management areas or nature centers have viewing blinds for visitors. Using them helps you observe wildlife without the animals knowing you are present. Viewing blinds can give you a front-row seat to seeing some pretty cool things!

**A vehicle is a good blind if you and your family see an animal near a road.** If this happens, make sure to pull off the road and have your parents turn on their hazard lights to warn other drivers. Stay inside the car to watch the animal. Use binoculars if you have them. It's okay to roll down a window if you can remember to be quiet. Wild animals have very good hearing and will hear you talking.



**It's important to pay attention to what the animal is doing.**

This can tell you if the animal is becoming uncomfortable. If the animal suddenly stops what it was doing and becomes restless, it is not comfortable. It might switch its tail, perk its ears toward you, or begin to make alarm calls. These are signs for you to slowly and quietly leave. By doing so, you will not cause the animal stress or make it use valuable energy trying to get away from you. Being a responsible wildlife watcher is the best way to learn about your wild neighbors.





# CITY WILDLIFE

THESE ANIMALS SOMETIMES LIVE IN OUR CITIES AND TOWNS. FIND THEM IN THE PUZZLE.

Bobcat	L	G	H	C	G	E	O	N	F	E	P	H	M	Z	E
Coyote	O	E	N	M	T	X	X	O	G	R	K	O	A	O	F
Deer	Q	O	R	O	Y	K	G	O	L	J	U	A	O	W	V
Duck	B	C	Y	R	K	S	D	C	B	S	K	W	N	T	K
Fox	P	O	R	X	I	K	L	C	E	G	L	R	D	S	R
Frog	C	J	U	E	M	U	Z	A	H	B	D	E	I	M	E
Hawk	N	M	N	T	M	N	Q	R	Q	B	I	K	E	Q	E
Mouse	F	B	R	G	L	K	O	S	P	U	T	D	N	H	D
Owl	X	J	O	A	C	L	I	A	U	Q	Z	U	V	S	M
Quail	L	R	S	T	B	M	F	I	I	N	D	U	K	N	W
Rabbit	F	R	A	C	G	B	K	A	N	Z	P	U	L	Q	O
Raccoon	J	O	R	H	U	S	I	H	Q	P	A	M	R	R	O
Skunk	F	V	G	L	Y	V	A	T	B	N	C	N	B	N	M
Snake	O	M	C	Q	M	B	O	B	C	A	T	D	U	C	K
Squirrel	X	Q	G	S	C	M	Z	W	P	L	D	R	U	H	K



Photos CCBY IDFG

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!  
If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to: [adare.evans@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:adare.evans@idfg.idaho.gov) or Wildlife Express, Idaho Fish and Game PO Box 25, Boise, ID 83707