



Living With Wildlife

Suburban Wildlife in Massachusetts



Photos by Bill Byrne

Massachusetts has many wildlife species that do well living near people. These are relatively common animals such as skunks, raccoons, gray fox, red fox, coyotes, wild turkey, black bear, fishers and more...

These species are attracted to human dominated landscapes because they are highly adaptable, opportunistic feeders that are energy efficient. By highly adaptable we mean that they can easily adjust to changes in their environment. Opportunistic feeders in that most are generalists eating a variety of plant and animal material including food left around by humans. They

are energy efficient in that when given the choice between a meal that has to be chased or one that is easily found in a backyard, they will always pick the easy meal. Everything these species do is related to the availability of food.

Here are some simple rules for living with wildlife that are attracted to areas near humans. These rules will help your surroundings become less attractive to wildlife species and may prevent conflicts with wildlife from arising.

- 1) **Don't feed wildlife!** Direct feeding can alter an animal's normal behavior. Problems occur when animals habituate to humans through a prolonged period of direct and/or indirect feeding.
- 2) **Keep all trash around your yard contained and picked up.** Do not put your trash out for pick up the next day unless it is in a sealed container that wildlife species cannot get into as many wildlife species are most active at night.
- 3) **Keep compost in a container that allows the material to vent but keeps wildlife from getting into it.**
- 4) **Do not feed pets outdoors.** This attracts wildlife right to your door.
- 5) **Do secure your pets.** Although free roaming pets are more likely to be killed by automobiles than by wild animals, there are wildlife species like coyotes that view cats as potential prey and dogs as competition for mates and food resources. For the safety of your pets, keep them restrained at all times.





- 6) **Do not remove bird feeders especially if problem wildlife species are seen around the feeders.** The seed in birdfeeders can attract many small and medium sized mammals (squirrels, chipmunks, mice) these, in turn attract animals that prey on squirrels, chipmunks, mice, et cetera. If possible, try to find a birdfeeder that does not allow seed to spill onto the ground.
- 7) **Close off crawl spaces under porches and sheds.** Wildlife will use these areas as dens for resting and raising their young.
- 8) **Do protect livestock and produce.** Wildlife species will prey upon livestock. There are techniques for protecting livestock from predation. Fencing can be useful in keeping wildlife out of certain areas. It is a good idea to clear fallen fruit from around fruit trees in the fall so as not to attract wildlife species.
- 9) **Don't approach or try to pet wildlife.** Don't provoke an encounter by moving too close to a wild animal or by restricting its free movement.
- 10) **Do educate your neighbors.** Pass this information along since your good efforts could be futile if neighbors are purposely or unintentionally providing food or shelter for wildlife.

The wildlife species that thrive in suburban environments are among the most adaptable and most interesting animals. Inevitably there are occasions when conflicts arise. If you experience property damage or if an animal appears ill, contact the closest *MassWildlife* District Office or Westborough Field Headquarters during business hours. If a problem requires immediate response contact local public safety officials or the Massachusetts Environmental Police at 1-800-632-8075.

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For more information contact **MassWildlife** at:

Western Wildlife District, Dalton: (413) 684-1646

Connecticut Valley Wildlife Dist., Belchertown: (413) 323-7632

Central Wildlife District, West Boylston: (508) 835-3607

Northeast Wildlife District, Ayer: (978) 772-2145

Southeast Wildlife District, Bourne: (508) 759-3406

Field Headquarters, Westborough: (508) 389-6300

or visit our website at www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/facilities/districts

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