



Urban Wildlife Issues
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried
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If you are a working parent, like me, you choose your field trips with care. Today's outing to the Museum of Anthropology at UBC was right up my alley; gorgeous setting, fabulous architecture and lots of historical Native artifacts. However the highlight of the day came from an unexpected source.

We were eating our packed lunches at the site of a World War II battery, when one of the children spotted a raccoon in what appeared to be a drain. The critter quickly decamped when confronted with 25 eight to ten year olds. But we had a good enough look to feel like we had "encountered" nature.

Raccoon encounters are quite frequent at this time of year, as animals prepare for the breeding season. Normally nocturnal, female raccoons will come out during the day in search of a den and to find the extra food needed for demanding spring activities.

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC was involved in a rather high profile raccoon encounter last week, one which had the TV cameras rolling and large numbers of Vancouverites involved in a nail biting drama.

A young female raccoon was caught in a tree. (Sounds ridiculous given that raccoons frequently nest in trees.) However this young lady was trapped in a hole for close to six hours. Passers by on Jervis, just off Davy, called the police. Our brave boys in blue, realizing that a trapped animal can be very dangerous, called in the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA). Two of our more experienced wildlife rehabilitators sedated the creature so they could get to work. Initially they tried cooking oil to smooth the way out. WRA has freed many skunks using this technique. When this didn't work they called in the Vancouver Parks Board, and the tree limb was cut down and lowered to the ground with the raccoon still inside. Parks Board officials then carefully cut open the tree limb with the sedated raccoon inside.

Kind folk who watched and worried will be pleased to know that our little raccoon is now safely in care at WRA. She is walking, but you can tell from looking at her that this was, and continues to be, a painful experience.

Initially we thought she was pregnant, but this is not the case. It is possible that she entered through one hole and then tried to exit through another smaller hole. We are guessing that she was born last year; perhaps she was too inexperienced to gauge the size of the hole.

Raccoons are adaptable animals and have succeeded well in our cities. In fact they are now densest in urban areas. They naturally nest in trees, but will also make their homes in attics and outbuildings in urban neighborhoods. If they have easy access to warm, quiet and safe places, they'll take it as a welcome sign. A tree leading up to the attic or a hole into the basement is a direct invitation.

Make sure small mammals are not able to get into your home prior to denning season. Block entries with metal mesh (1 cm x 1cm). If they have already made dens in your home try installing a battery-operated radio and a trouble light. This will upset the nocturnal creatures and they may move out.

Of course securing your garbage goes hand in hand with blocking access to human dwellings. You can purchase special animal-proof garbage cans or simply tie your cans up with bungee cord.

I hope you enjoy getting outside and reconnecting with neighbours; those who live in houses or apartment and those who live in the wild.