

Urban Wildlife Issues  
Wildlife Rescue column by Devin Manky  
as appearing in the **Burnaby NOW** newspaper September 29, 2007

## Managing our relationship with wildlife

I recently heard a news story on the radio about a group of raccoons that “broke into a house to attack a cat.”

Since raccoons are not predatory by nature, I realized that there was more to this story.

I considered the possible scenarios that may have led to this incident. A group of five raccoons indicates to me that it was a mother with her offspring.



Photo credit: Tracy Riddell

**Night visitors:** Raccoons are one of the most common kinds of urban wildlife, and negative encounters with them can be minimized if homeowners take proper precautions.

Since raccoons are territorial, this family had likely been living in the area with a den nearby.

In a quest for food, the raccoon family would scope out the local neighborhoods every evening.

Raccoons have an incredible sense of smell and it can be difficult to hide food from their ever-searching noses.

One of the more ‘aromatic’ attractants to animals such as raccoons, skunks, coyotes and opossums is cat food.

So how would a family of raccoons that smelled tasty cat food get into a house to feed?

Well, thanks to the remarkable invention of the two-way cat door, they had an easy access route. Once inside they would have quickly found the food.

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Wildlife Rescue  
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Raccoons prefer easy foraging or an undisturbed scavenge and will not go out of their way to confront another animal.

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However, raccoons are wild animals that will defend themselves if they are cornered or surprised.

Being very defensive creatures and having found an excellent food source, they would not want to give it up.

Consequently, when the cat came to eat or to check out the intruders, the altercation broke out. At this point, the cat’s owner appeared and witnessed the raccoons ‘attacking’ his cat.

I later learned that the raccoons had indeed entered the house through a cat door and that food was the attractant.

Unfortunately, one of the raccoons in this situation was euthanized. It sustained injuries from the cat’s owner who attacked it in an effort to protect his pet.

Unfortunately, the news story spread fears and myths about raccoons that are unwarranted. A few simple precautions can help homeowners reduce potential conflicts with raccoons and other urban wildlife.

First, become aware that raccoons could be living around your neighborhood and take steps to avoid conflict.

Raccoons are less likely to roam your property if you keep your yard clean of any food items and make sure pet food is not available, especially at night.

Second, make sure pet doors are secured both at nighttime and when you are away from your property.

To help reduce odours that can attract wildlife into your house, keep food far away from the pet door.

Finally, if raccoons do find their way into your home, just open doors and chase them out of the house with an object such as a broom.

There is no need to harm the animals, as they are already afraid of you and will want to escape to the safety of outdoors.

We, as urban dwellers, must realize that wild animals are present in our communities. They live in our yards, our neighborhoods and our parks. They still abide by natural rules of existence that have been hard wired into them for thousands of years.

Food, shelter and warmth are their primary goals in life.

If our yards and houses are providing easy meals or warm garages, attics and cellars in which to nest, it should come as no surprise that wildlife would try to take advantage of the situation.

Conversely, if we take away these attractants by eliminating food sources and entry areas into our homes, wildlife will normally stay away from humans and their pets.

Human-wildlife interactions often end in conflict, and sometimes, even tragedy.

In this case, a pet was attacked and a raccoon lost its life.

You can help prevent another sad news story by following a few simple steps that encourage wildlife to remain in their natural habitats and away from human dwellings.

For more information, visit the FAQ section of the Wildlife Rescue Association's website at [www.wildliferescue.ca](http://www.wildliferescue.ca).