

## WILDLIFE AND HUMAN CONFLICT - CAN WE RESOLVE THEM?



Home is important. Whether it is a cabin, a mansion, a hollow log or a burrow, home is cherished. It is something to be protected from outsiders, especially if it houses young family members. Homes and their locations are chosen by people and animals for much the same reasons – size, safety, and proximity to amenities such as good food sources.

We humans often choose to forget that wildlife have property rights too, and, like us, want to be left in peace to raise their young. Because of the careless and untidy habits of

humans, conflicts may occur. When they do, it is usually the animals that lose out.

In effective conflict resolution, it is helpful to understand the opponent's point of view. Take, for example, neighbourhood raccoons. A mother raccoon will den close to a porch that offers a good supply of pet food or an overflowing garbage can that allows easy foraging. Conflicts then occur with the family pet and the irate homeowner who may hear the patter of little feet in the attic or backyard! This problem is easily avoided by always feeding pets inside, covering compost well and securing garbage inside or in tightly closed, tip-proof containers. A splash of laundry bleach in the garbage can masks attractive odors and bothers the sensitive noses of skunks and raccoons.

If wildlife is encouraged by feeding, expect to have families establish themselves close by. One family is cute, but next year do you want the grandchildren as well? Early spring is an excellent time to check your property for potential problems. Move the woodpile away from the house, trim trees overhanging the roof, repair holes in screening and eaves where squirrels and raccoons - and even rats - can enter the attic. Ensure the chimney is screened.

Removing and relocating an animal with young is not a good solution for this most often results in the abandonment or death of the babies. Also, if an animal is removed from a territory, it leaves a vacuum into which another animal will quickly move. If a neighbour feeds raccoons, you will have them around your house too until the feeding is stopped.

Wildlife rescue centres have many strategies that are effective in getting mom to move the family herself, or you can opt to wait until the young are old enough to leave on their own before closing up the entry hole. One homeowner very reluctantly let a family of skunks remain under her garden shed. Several weeks later, she called to say how much pleasure the antics of mother and babies, playing in her garden at dusk, had given her. And no, she was never sprayed!

Swallows in the eaves? Bats in the attic? Before removing these, remember the enormous number of flying insects, including mosquitoes, they eat daily. A six-ounce bat can eat its own weight in bugs overnight! Save the bug spray. Bats usually appear here in mid-April and leave for hibernation by mid September. Swallows are gone by late August. This is the time to block entry points and remove old nests. Consider installing nest or roost boxes so the critters can enjoy homes of their own next spring.

We live in an area rich in wildlife, even in the more urban areas. Unlike us, many of these wild creatures have nowhere else to go. We are building into deer and bear habitat, draining small local wetlands and closing in creeks. Some animals like coyotes are adapting quickly but to the consternation of some. Others, like migratory songbirds, arrive from Central and South America in spring to find last years patch of woodland no longer there. A few simple considerations will help us to live with them, to everyone's benefit.

- Clean regularly under bird feeders
- Screen chimneys and other openings into the house and shed
- Feed pets inside
- Keep cats inside (it is safer for them, too)
- Contain garbage
- Pick up fallen fruit
- If there are bears in the area, hang bird feeders out-of-reach or take them down.
- Never offer food handouts

Most of all, if you learn a little about your wild neighbours, you will be more comfortable around them. You might even enjoy their company. Remember, good neighbours are hard to find!