

# Living with Nuisance Wildlife



Photo: Scott Ziegenhagen, ODFW

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**S**kunks, opossum, raccoons, coyotes, deer, and elk often are lumped into the unofficial taxonomic family “nuisance wildlife.” Actually, any kind of wildlife can fit this description, from rattlesnakes to woodpeckers, and even beavers. Most often, however, problems caused by nuisance wildlife can be managed or avoided altogether.

## Simple solutions to nuisance wildlife problems

Let’s start with the easiest solutions. The vast majority of the phone calls to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) dealing with raccoons, skunks, opossum, and even bear can be solved by eliminating one thing from the general area: “food.” Eliminating the food source usually gets rid of even the most chronic problems.

The biggest enticements are dog and cat food left outside, either at your house or a neighbor’s house. Feeding pets inside will easily remedy this problem. If you check around, you may even find that someone is intentionally feeding the wildlife.

The next most common food source is unsecured garbage and compost piles. Storing garbage in secure containers or buildings will solve this problem. Check with your local gardening club to obtain plans for building a secure composter.

The next easiest fix is to block the preferred nesting/resting places for nuisance wildlife. Such places include outbuildings and the space under decks and houses.

If none of these strategies works, you can contract with a private “critter getter” business to trap the animals. If you’re more adventurous, you can rent, buy, or build your own live trap; obtain a permit from ODFW; and trap the animals yourself. You do not need a permit to trap the nonnative opossum or fox squirrel. Permits are needed for trapping most other species.

If you suspect a skunk is the problem, use a completely enclosed trap to limit the chance of getting sprayed. If you only have access to an open mesh

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trap, cover it with a tarp after catching a skunk. A good mixture to get rid of skunk odor is 1 quart 3% hydrogen peroxide +  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup baking soda + 1 teaspoon liquid soap.

## Wildlife relocation

Some animals can be relocated, but relocation generally is not the best option. Animals relocated to unfamiliar territory, especially those used to urban sources of food and shelter, usually find wildlands unsuited to their behavioral patterns. Consequently, most relocated animals either starve to death, are taken by predators, or are killed when crossing unfamiliar roads. Animals that do survive relocation usually end up as someone else's problem.

Relocated animals also can cause disease outbreaks and/or the spread of non-native species (for example, opossum, fox squirrel, and starlings). Nonnative animals may not be relocated off-site and should be euthanized humanely.

If you do plan to relocate healthy native animals, you first must check with your local ODFW office for suitable release sites.

The recommended method for dealing with problem urban wildlife is humane euthanasia.

## Deer and elk

Deer and elk can at times cause damage. There are some solutions for addressing damage by these animals, but not many.

You can grow landscape plants that deer and elk don't like or try using smell and taste deterrent sprays. These sprays may help in the short term, but they offer no protection to new growth, so they must be reapplied frequently. Some people have had success with hanging scented soaps, human hair, and diesel-soaked rags on or near affected plants. More tempting areas, such as gardens, alfalfa fields, vineyards, and orchards in close proximity to deer or elk habitat, likely will require a permanent 8-foot-tall woven wire fence.

The Oregon State University Extension publication *The Wildlife Garden: Reduce Deer Damage in Your Yard*, EC 1557, offers some good suggestions for deer and elk repellents and exclusion devices. *Deer-Resistant Ornamental Plants*, EC 1440, provides a list of plants that deer find less attractive.

Hunting can reduce local populations of deer and elk. The Landowner Hunting Preference Program (see "LOP" in the current Oregon Big Game Regulations) may help you obtain deer and/or elk tags valid for your property. LOP tag holders can keep the animal they harvest; in some cases, this provides an extra deer hunting opportunity. Check with your local ODFW office to see whether you qualify and to register your property.

You also may allow anyone you wish to hunt on your property, as long as it is legal to do so and the hunter has the appropriate license and tag.



Photo: Scott Ziegenhagen, ODFW

ODFW may issue kill permits for chronic problems that cannot be solved by other means. With a kill permit, the landowner or his/her agent may harvest the offending animal, field dress, skin, and deliver the carcass to a meat-processing business. The meat is processed and distributed by charitable organizations to low-income families. Some game meat may go to individuals who have a medical condition requiring a low-fat diet.

## Coyote, fox, bobcat, bear, and cougar

Coyote, fox, bobcat, bear, and cougar (mountain lion) are considered damage-causing wildlife when they harass or kill livestock or pets. Hunting may be an effective way to solve this type of damage. Chances are you know someone who would like the opportunity to harvest coyote, fox, cougar, bobcat, or bear on your property. Contact ODFW for hunting regulations.

If people, livestock, or pets are in imminent danger from a predator, the predator can be shot without a permit at any time. If a bobcat, fox, cougar, or bear is taken under these circumstances, the incident must be reported to ODFW or the Oregon State Police immediately. If you do not have the required tag/permit, or the incident occurs outside the legal hunting season for the species, you cannot take the animal into your possession. Coyotes causing damage are not protected and therefore require no reporting, tags, or permits.

Remember, as with any use of firearms, you must be outside city limits, use due caution, and shoot only in a known safe direction. Be sure that the caliber of weapon you use is sufficient for the size of animal you are shooting.

In extreme cases, ODFW can authorize the use of dogs or traps (usually by a Wildlife Services agent under USDA-APHIS) to catch an offending cougar, bear, bobcat, fox, or coyote.

ODFW has a “Living with Wildlife” brochure series that includes brochures on mountain lion and black bear. These brochures provide useful information on how to coexist with these animals in a rural setting, general biology, and how to act if you encounter these animals in the wild.

## Snakes

The only poisonous snake native to Oregon is the western rattlesnake. These snakes generally are not aggressive and do not bite people if left alone. The vast majority of rattlesnake bites occur when a snake is handled or is stepped on accidentally. The best way to guard against a snake bite is to educate yourself and your family to identify rattlesnakes and to leave them alone.

To keep rattlesnakes out of your yard, you can build a solid fence that is snug to the ground and at least 2½ feet tall. Snakes are attracted to moist, cool areas during hot, dry weather, including watered lawns and shaded areas under decks, houses, and woodpiles. If a snake will not leave on its own, someone with



Photo: Scott Ziegenhagen, ODFW





Photo: Keith Fox, ODFW

experience handling rattlesnakes can remove it. If necessary, rattlesnakes can be killed by private citizens.

No other snake native to Oregon is capable of seriously harming a person. All other snakes can be safely removed with a stick, shovel, or broom.

## Rodents

Meadow voles (field mice), gophers, ground squirrels, and moles (actually an insectivore) frequently cause problems in orchards, pastures, backyards, and many other settings. Control methods include poisons, traps, attracting beneficial predators,

sanitation, and management of cover. Each method has its own challenges.

If applied correctly, poison baits can work well for gophers, mice, and ground squirrels. If applied incorrectly, poisons can affect nontarget wildlife, household pets, and even children. Always read and follow label directions carefully when using poison baits. Traps work well for mice, gophers, and moles, but they must be checked and baited frequently.

Natural predators such as raptors, foxes, and coyotes offer free rodent control if you have good habitat for perching and ground cover for stalking. It is important to remember, however, that predators also may prey on pets, livestock, or desirable wildlife.

As with other nuisance wildlife, better sanitation and eliminating food sources such as pet food, bird seed, and garbage will help eliminate field mice. Removal of protective cover immediately adjacent to crops and buildings discourages field mice as well. Oregon State University and Washington State University have excellent publications concerning gopher, mole, and ground squirrel management and control around the home and farmstead.

Porcupines and mountain beaver are two other rodents that can cause significant damage to trees. Neither of these is protected by wildlife laws, and permits or tags are not required for their removal.



Photo: Keith Fox, ODFW

## Beavers

Beavers are a natural and beneficial part of stream and river ecosystems. At times, however, their dam-building activity can threaten roadways and agricultural fields by plugging culverts and causing flooding. Beavers also may impede woody vegetation reestablishment along streams and riparian corridors.

To protect ornamental trees or large trees in a riparian area, cage the trunks with 4-foot-high, small-mesh woven wire. As a last resort, beavers may be shot or dead-trapped by a Wildlife Services agent, or by a landowner who possesses the proper permit from ODFW. Beavers can be trapped and relocated to a different drainage where there is no potential for conflict. Your local ODFW office may have a list of trappers that can, during season, trap beavers for sale in the fur market.

## Rabbits and hares

Eastern and nuttall's cottontail rabbits and brush rabbits (true rabbits) and blacktailed and whitetailed jackrabbits (hares) can damage yard and garden plants as well as forage crops such as alfalfa. Eastern and nuttall's cottontail rabbits, brush rabbits (mostly western Oregon), and blacktailed jackrabbits are not protected and can be eliminated by any legal means, including hunting, without a special permit or tag. However, whitetailed jackrabbits and pygmy rabbits are protected. Thus, if a jackrabbit has a black tail, you can deal with it on your own. If the jackrabbit's tail is white, you must contact ODFW.



Photo: Scott Ziegenhagen, ODFW

Cottontails, brush rabbits, and pygmy rabbits are much smaller than jackrabbits. Pygmy rabbits look much like cottontails, but generally are smaller and have proportionally shorter ears. Pygmy rabbits are unlikely to bother your yard and garden plants or crops because they are rare and confined to sagebrush habitat. Snowshoe hares are also unlikely to cause damage unless you live in a higher elevation forested area. Snowshoe hares are smaller than jackrabbits with bigger feet and shorter ears, and they are white in the winter.

Taste and smell deterrent sprays can be effective with rabbits and hares in small areas. Fences used to deter rabbits must be of small mesh (2 x 2 inches or less), buried 18 inches into the ground, and more than 4 feet high.

## Birds

Waterfowl such as ducks, and especially geese, can cause severe damage to crops such as grass seed, wheat, and pastures. Anyone can haze ducks or geese from crops without a permit. You can obtain a permit from the Oregon State Fire Marshal's office to buy hazing fireworks, which are shot out of a special pistol or a 12-gauge shotgun to scare off waterfowl. Another option is a propane cannon, which can be set to go off at intervals throughout the day. Hazing birds can have good results in the short term, but geese and ducks get used to these methods, so you will need to vary your scare tactics over time.

Some people have had success training dogs to chase off waterfowl, and others have used dog silhouettes and electronically animated scarecrows. September goose-hunting seasons have been set to target damage-causing geese; see the current Oregon Game Bird Regulations. You can contact the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for other ideas.

Woodpeckers, flickers, and sapsuckers can damage wood-sided homes and out-buildings by pecking holes and sometimes even creating cavity nests in the roof rafters. Stapling small mesh ( $\frac{1}{2}$ - to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch) weld wire over holes and eliminating access to the space under eaves is effective. Hazing birds with water balloons or a hose sometimes works well.

Roosting birds can pose problems by "whitewashing" buildings, cars, customers, etc. The most effective deterrent is to design outdoor lighting, roof lines, and other building structures to minimize roosting areas. Various aftermarket wire products can be affixed to perching/roosting areas to prevent birds from landing.



Photo: Scott Ziegenhagen, ODFW

Starlings, house sparrows, and rock pigeons are the only birds that have no protection and can be dealt with in any manner you see fit. Crows and magpies also can be taken without a permit if they are coming from, going to, or in the act of damaging agricultural crops.

For all other migratory birds (including those discussed above), contact the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for permit requirements and other damage prevention ideas.

Upland game birds are those listed in the Oregon Game Bird Regulations synopsis (pheasant, grouse, quail, chukar, Hungarian partridge); harvesting is governed by season and license requirements. If you are experiencing damage by upland game birds, call ODFW.

## Injured or “abandoned” wildlife

If you come across seemingly injured or abandoned wildlife, in almost every case it is best to let nature take its course and not disturb the animal. Before disturbing any wildlife, determine without a reasonable doubt that the animal is orphaned or injured to such an extent that it will not survive on its own.

Most wildlife leave their young seemingly unattended for hours at a time, returning to nurse or feed only when there is no sign of danger. Fledgling birds often venture from a nest and are fed on the ground or in vegetation away from the nest site. Young animals are considered abandoned only if the adult is found dead or the young animal’s body condition has deteriorated over a course of days without any evidence that the adult has visited the site.

If the animal is native to the area and has a reasonable chance of survival only with treatment, it may be a candidate for rehabilitation. Private licensed rehabilitators can work with most kinds of wildlife if their facilities have available space. Wildlife may be held captive only by licensed rehabilitators.

If you are certain that an animal is suffering from a soon-to-be-fatal injury, you can, as humanely as possible, put it out of its misery. It is legal for concerned citizens to do so, but make sure to immediately inform a local ODFW or Oregon State Police office of the circumstances involved. You may not take the animal into your possession.

## Other nuisance animal problems

ODFW does not have jurisdiction over livestock, domestic pets, or migratory birds (waterfowl and songbirds). Your county Animal Control Officer deals with pet issues, the Oregon Department of Agriculture deals with livestock, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services deals with migratory birds.

If you find dead wildlife on your property, you can double bag it and put it in your trash, as most garbage services will take animals bagged in this manner. Contact your disposal service first to make sure they will take the animal. Be careful when handling dead animals; use gloves and wash with soap and warm water afterward.



If there is a large dead animal on your property, your best option is to bury it or pull it downwind from your house. Spreading lime on the carcass will speed decomposition and reduce odor. Do not place lime or animal carcasses within 200 feet of a waterway or anywhere that runoff water from the deposit site may enter a waterway.

If a large animal carcass is impeding traffic on a public roadway under county or state jurisdiction, the county or state might remove the animal.

## Additional resources

Oregon State University and Washington State University offer excellent publications dealing with management and control of nuisance wildlife. Both also offer publications about enhancing wildlife habitat.

An excellent website from the University of Nebraska titled “The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management” has a host of publications and hints on handling wildlife damage issues ([icw.dm.org](http://icw.dm.org)).

Live animal traps often are sold or rented at local feed stores.

### Oregon State University Extension Service publications

The following publications are available from the OSU Extension Service. Visit the website ([extension.oregonstate.edu](http://extension.oregonstate.edu)) or call 541-737-2513 or your local Extension office for prices and ordering information. Many of these publications are available online.

*Building an Electric Antipredator Fence*, PNW 225

*Controlling Ground Squirrel Damage to Forages and Field Crops, Ditches, and Dams*, EC 1429

*Controlling Moles*, EC 987

*Controlling Pocket Gopher Damage to Agricultural Crops*, EC 1117

*Controlling Pocket Gopher Damage to Conifer Seedlings*, EC 1255

*Deer-resistant Ornamental Plants*, EC 1440

*The Wildlife Garden: Reduce Deer Damage in Your Yard*, EC 1557

### Washington State University Extension publications

Washington State University publications are available through WSU Extension offices or through their publications website (<http://pubs.wsu.edu/cgi-bin/pubs/index.html>).

### Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife publications

Many of the following publications are available at Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife’s website ([www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us)) under “Living with Wildlife” on the Wildlife Division page.

*Living with Wildlife—Urban Wildlife*

*Living With Wildlife—Mountain Lion*

*Living with Wildlife—Black Bear*

*Living with Wildlife—Wolves*

*Living with Wildlife—Bats*

*Oregon Is Black Bear Country—Guidelines for Living with Black Bears*

*Oregon’s Small Mammals* (good source for identification)



Photo: Pat Welch

# Technical resources

With any situation involving wild animals, there are an infinite number of problems and solutions. The following table will help you determine whom to contact for help and/or advice.

Problem animal	Agency and website	Phone number
Wild, free-ranging big game species: deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep, bear, cougar, bobcat	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) (www.dfw.state.or.us)	503-947-6002, or check phone book for local office
Coyote, cougar, bear, beaver	USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (www.aphis.usda.gov/ws)	See whether your county sponsors a Wildlife Services agent, 503-326-2346
	ODFW	503-947-6002, or check local phone book
Raccoon, beaver, fox, river otter, badger, rabbit, chipmunk, squirrel, skunk, opossum, reptiles, amphibians	ODFW for contact numbers for private animal control businesses or permit to trap yourself	503-947-6002, or check phone book for local office
Gopher, mole, field mice in crops and around homes and farmsteads	Local OSU Extension office	Check phone book or OSU Extension Service website (extension.oregonstate.edu/index.php) to locate the nearest office
Upland birds: quail, chukar, huns, pheasant, grouse, wild turkey	ODFW	503-947-6002, or check phone book for local office
Livestock: cattle, domestic sheep, horses, chickens, pigs, etc.	Oregon Department of Agriculture, Brand Inspector (oregon.gov/ODA)	503-986-4681; ask for local contact
Pets: dogs, cats, etc.	County animal control officer	Check phone book for local office
Migratory birds: waterfowl, vultures, hawks, eagles, owls, crows, ravens, magpies, woodpeckers, sapsuckers, flickers, starlings, gulls, etc.	USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (www.fws.gov)	See whether your county sponsors a Wildlife Services agent, 503-326-2346
Injured or orphaned wildlife	ODFW to help locate a local licensed rehabilitator	503-947-6002, or check phone book for local office
	Portland Audubon Society (www.audubonportland.org)	503-292-0304; ask for local contact

**Note for Washington:** In general, the use of body-gripping traps is not permitted in Washington, although there may be some exceptions. If you live in Washington, contact your local office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for current information.



Photo: Pat Welch

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