

Living with Urban Wildlife

The recent encounters with four mountain lions by two residents, one of whom saved his dog's life with his intervention, brings to the forefront the difficult issue of urban wildlife.

Mountain lions are rightly perceived as consummate predators that will take whatever "game" is easily available to them. It is usually other wildlife—generally small mammals—but can also be your dog or cat. Humans reacting appropriately to the threat of a mountain lion attack, unless caught by surprise or dealing with a former pet mountain lion with no fear of people, will generally be able to thwart an attack. Success depends on keeping one's head about them and not running away with panicked screams, both of which will make you look and sound like prey and make an attack more likely. If threatened, try to do the following:

- Face the mountain lion and make yourself look and sound as large and threatening as possible
- If you are with children or small pets, don't let them run or scream. Keep them near you. Be aware that bending over to pick a child or pet up will make you look more like a four legged prey animal so exercise careful judgment in deciding whether or not to pick them up based on how your children or pets are reacting to the threat.
- Back away slowly, all the while continuing to make yourself look and sound as large and threatening as possible.
- If the mountain lion attacks and you have no suitable weapon at hand, gouging the eyes should give you the best opportunity to end the attack.
- When the threat is over, notify the California Department of Fish and Game at (831) 649-2870.

Black bears are also occasionally seen in urban areas. They are quite powerful, but are generally just looking for an easy meal in a garbage can or dumpster, rather than seeking live prey to capture and eat. None the less, they should be given a wide berth using the same techniques one would use if faced with a mountain lion. In addition, if confronted by a black bear, be aware of your surroundings and be careful never to move to a position that places you between the adult bear and their cub. You could provoke a protective attack.

The most common urban wildlife and the most loved and reviled, depending on who you're talking to, is the raccoon. One group wants to enjoy their beauty and unique antics up close and facilitate that by actively feeding them to entice their continued and often growing presence in their own back yard, a presence that spills over into the whole neighborhood. This activity is generally prohibited by ordinance to protect people and is not in the best interest of the raccoons. Raccoons treated in this way lose their fear of people and become at best a nuisance to others and at worst a danger to people and pets.

Prolific feeding leads to overpopulation. Overpopulation facilitates the transmission of diseases like distemper that leads to a prolonged and painful death for the animal and

periodically decimates the raccoon population. Overpopulation also leads to more negative encounters with people including the proliferation of a hidden danger, especially to very young children.

The roundworm parasite Baylisascaris is fairly common in raccoons. When an infected raccoon defecates in a yard or garden or child's sand box, millions of eggs pass in to the environment and become infective after two to four weeks. With adequate moisture, they can remain viable for years. When ingested by humans working or playing in the soil or with objects contaminated with raccoon feces the eggs hatch into larvae and travel throughout the body. Few cases are diagnosed and some cases are diagnosed as other infections.

Because of their hand-to-mouth nature, young children are particularly at risk of infection and the results can be deadly or leave them with tragic lifelong disabilities. In our view, facilitating the explosion in the urban raccoon population through illegal feeding is both inhumane for the raccoon and creates unwarranted risks for humans.

Black tail deer have proliferated in urban areas with only the occasional mountain lion as a natural predator. Thankfully, the vast majority of negative encounters between people and deer occur over ornamental plantings that are particularly attractive to people and particularly tasty to deer. Many measures including coyote urine, human urine, bars of soap or human hair hung on posts, and many others too numerous to mention have been held out as surefire ways to repel deer. At the risk of adding to this hotly contested subject, the only product I have found to be consistently useful for deer and sometimes raccoons is an impulse sprinkler covering the area to be protected that is activated by a motion detector. One such unit is marketed as the Scarecrow Motion Activated Sprinkler.

The SPCA responds to more calls regarding injured deer during the fall rutting season than any other time of year because they are on the move looking for mates and often are hit by cars. Each year we warn drivers to be on the lookout for their own safety as well as the deer's safety. Many Good Samaritans that attempt to help an injured deer or one caught in a fence are often injured by flailing hooves or gored by antlers.

If you find an injured deer that is contained or otherwise immobilized, call The SPCA Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center at 373-2631 for advice or rescue. We respond to all calls and dispatch a rescue vehicle where there is any reasonable chance that the injured animal (of any species) will still be at the scene when we arrive. Unfortunately, many deer are able to run for miles with grievous injuries that will eventually kill them and we are not able to track them and offer euthanasia as the humane alternative.

Additional information and useful links for more information on urban wildlife can be found on The SPCA website at www.SPCAmc.org.

The SPCA Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center urges you to make a New Year resolution to keep your community safe for people and animals by not feeding our urban wildlife.

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