



Town of Longboat Key

▶ A Citizen's Guide To Nuisance Wildlife



www.longboatkey.org

All of us came to this paradise we call Longboat Key for similar reasons. Sun, sea, weather, water, fresh air, good food...nature at it's best. It's interesting that we share all of these reasons for being here with our wildlife neighbors. Longboat Key, and all of our great State of Florida, is home to more wildlife species than most other states. Residents and visitors enjoy seeing and hearing wildlife on a daily basis. Many of these experiences are enjoyable; others are confrontational. Some of the unpleasant encounters result when we don't understand why they occur.

Understanding is the key to wildlife problem solving. Knowing why the snake is in your garden, the armadillo is digging up your lawn, or the raccoon is getting into your garbage is an essential first step toward resolving these and other wildlife nuisance problems. Often times the reasons are obvious. Snakes prefer shaded areas where they might find a toad, mouse, or other food item. Some problems such as woodpeckers damaging house siding may be puzzling and require some research. Pecking in one spot that produces a loud resonating sound is a method used to mark territories. Other types of pecking patterns may be the result of woodpeckers foraging for wood-boring insects that have infested your siding. Sometimes the opinion of a wildlife expert is needed to help interpret your findings.

Misunderstandings are common causes of many frustrations and fears that people have about wildlife. For example, contrary to popular belief, most snakes in Florida couldn't even hurt you let alone kill you. All bats don't carry rabies. Understanding why certain conditions exist can alleviate many of these phobias and help you to appreciate wildlife more for their beneficial values, particularly in our urban environments.

The **information** provided here is to give you what you may need to understand your wildlife problems and assist you in solving them.

Useful Contacts:

Manatee County Extension Program by phone (941) 722-4524

Sarasota County Extension Program by phone (941) 861-9500

University of Florida website <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.html>

Florida Wildlife Commission by phone (888-404-FWCC (3922)) or website <http://myfwc.com>.

You can find lists of local nuisance wildlife trapper contact information on this site.

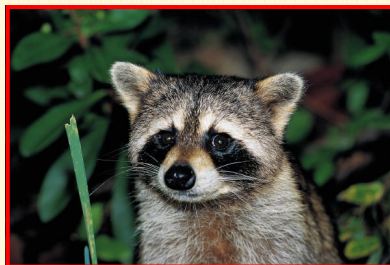




A Citizen's Guide to Nuisance Wildlife

RACCOONS quite often make pests of themselves by getting into garbage cans, eating pet food, getting into attics or beneath houses, and eating home-grown fruits and vegetables. Raccoons are a major carrier of rabies in Florida. In order to solve these problems we must understand that these opportunistic mammals adapt well to urbanization. They will eat any plant, insect, or other animal food that is readily available. Raccoons have learned that uncapped chimneys make a very good substitute for the more traditional hollow den trees.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) is the designated legal steward of the native wildlife resources of the state through our State Constitution. Certain laws, rules, and regulations providing guidelines regarding baiting, trapping, transporting, or killing nuisance wildlife have been promulgated to assist this agency in preserving Florida's wildlife.



"I know I'm cute, but please don't feed me! I'll just get used to dining here!"

BIOLOGY — These 10- to 30-pound, 2- to 3-foot grizzled salt-and-pepper- gray and black animals are normally active during the evening hours. It is not unusual, though, for them to be seen during the morning hours as well, depending on weather conditions. Raccoons have a home range of 1 to 3 square miles and are somewhat territorial, especially the males. Small groups, most likely females with young or unassociated adults from neighboring territories brought together by a large food source, can be seen where food is plentiful. Raccoons may travel more than a mile from their home range to feed. Severe reductions in their territory size is well tolerated with densities of 100 per square mile being attained around abundant food sources.

Raccoons are not fussy about their choice of food. Fruits, acorns, ripe vegetables and seeds, eggs, insects, crayfish, frogs, fish and small mammals are all on the menu. They will even eat dead animals and raid any bird feeders and pet bowls when they're kept full. These inquisitive animals will even check your garbage cans that aren't secured.

Man is one of the few enemies raccoons have. A few are killed by predators such as bobcats and horned owls, but the overall numbers are insignificant. Automobiles likely kill more.

The greatest problem with raccoons is disease. Although known to carry a wide variety of diseases, most are harmless to people but some, such as distemper, can kill raccoons when their populations are too dense. Less than one out of 200 raccoons are exposed to rabies.

UNDERSTANDING — Raccoons are one of our most successful urban animals and are therefore frequently observed in our yards and around our homes. This should not, by itself, be cause for alarm. Under most conditions, raccoons are harmless, interesting neighbors. Treated as part of the natural community, you will occasionally get a glimpse of one going about its business, and these can be fascinating times. Problems with raccoons often arise because we find it so difficult not to "do something" for them.

By putting food out for raccoons, we condition them to lose their "respect" for people—a trait that aids greatly in their ability to survive.

Prevention is the key to dealing with raccoon problems. **Do not feed raccoons! It is illegal to place or offer food or garbage in a way that it attracts raccoons and creates a public nuisance.** (Florida Administrative Code, Rule 68A-4.001 (3)).

We inadvertently feed raccoons by leaving out pet food bowls with food in them, overfilling bird feeders, not securing garbage can lids, or closing dumpster bins all the way. This causes local populations to become denser than the habitat can adequately support.

At these times, raccoons begin to look more closely at your home to provide them shelter and they are more likely to become ill and to transmit disease.

SOLVING — Raccoons often become a nuisance because of their feeding habits. When this occurs, your best strategy is to prevent their access to food whenever possible.

If raccoons are raiding your pet's food dish, feed your pet during the daylight hours and remove the uneaten food before dusk. Don't just move it onto a screened-in porch area. Raccoons will damage the screens to access any remaining food in the dish.

If they are raiding your garbage can, make it inaccessible by weighting the lid down. Keeping your garbage can in the garage or building a bin with a latched lid to store them in between garbage days. Placing your garbage at the curb on collection day before 7:00 a.m. rather than the night before will be helpful especially for those garbage cans that are overfilled and the lid is not be secure. This keeps the raccoons out of the garbage can as well as other opportunistic neighbors like dogs.

The green auto cart distributed by Waste Management has a secure lid that raccoons cannot get into *unless* it is not properly closed.

Solving the raccoon problem consists of a few simple steps:

- 1) Don't feed the wildlife! They have a varied menu provided by nature to sustain them.
- 2) Secure your garbage can lids or make your dumpster inaccessible.
- 3) Wildlife are creatures of habit...if you provide for them, they'll return and make themselves at home.

