Tame Your Nuisance Wildlife

By: Scott Ziegenhagen, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and Brian Tuck, OSU Wasco County Extension

Skunks, opossum, raccoons, coyotes, even deer and elk are all at times prominent members of the “nuisance” family of wildlife. Sure, any kind of wildlife can fit this classification from rattle snakes to woodpeckers to busy little beavers, but often times their presence can be managed, if not avoided all together.

Lets start with the easiest fixes. Ninety percent of the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife’s (ODFW) calls dealing with raccoons, skunks, opossum, even bear, can be solved by eliminating one thing from the general area, “food”. The biggest culprits are dog and cat food left outside either at yours or the neighbor’s house. The next most common food source is unsecured garbage and compost piles. If you check around you may even find someone who is specifically feeding the wildlife. Eliminating the food source will usually get rid of even the most chronic problems. The next easiest fix is to block all access under decks, outbuildings, and your house, as these are all preferred nesting/resting places for nuisance wildlife. If none of this works, you can contract with private “critter getter” businesses to come and trap the offending animals for you. 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 opossum or fox squirrel. Some animals can be relocated, but that generally is not the best option. Animals relocated into unfamiliar territory, especially those used to urban sources of food and shelter, usually find wild-lands unsuited to their behavioral patterns. Consequently, most relocated animals either starve to death or are taken by predators. Relocated animals could also cause disease outbreaks and/or the spread of non-native species (example: opossum, fox squirrel, and starlings). All nonnative animals must not be relocated. The recommended method for dealing with any surplus urban wildlife is humane euthanasia.

Deer and elk can also be classified as damage causing wildlife. There are again some quick fixes for these animals, but not as many. You can grow landscape plants that are unpalatable, or get some smell and taste deterrent sprays that can help. Some people have had success with hanging scented soaps, human hair, and diesel soaked rags on or near plants they wanted to protect. More tempting crops such as gardens, alfalfa, vine, and orchard plants located in areas that are close to wild-land deer or elk habitat will likely require permanent eight-foot fences for protection. Sustaining or increasing hunting opportunities on your property can help reduce local damage caused by deer or elk populations. If you own 40 contiguous acres or more you can sign up for the Landowner Preference Program (see page 21 of the 2003 Oregon Big Game Regulations) and be guaranteed that not less than two of your friends or family draw antlerless deer/elk tags for your property. ODFW can also issue kill permits for chronic problems that can’t seem to be solved by other means. The landowner or their agent can harvest the offending animals under the issued kill permits, field dress, skin, and deliver the carcass to a meat processing business. The meat is then processed and distributed by charitable organizations such as the Salvation Army. Some game meat may also go to individuals who have a medical need
Coyotes, bobcat, bear, and cougar can also be considered as damage causing wildlife when it comes to loss of livestock and pets. If you are protecting people, livestock, or pets that are in imminent danger from a large predator, the predator can be shot. If a bobcat, cougar, or bear are taken under these circumstances, the incident must be reported to ODFW or the Oregon State Police immediately. Coyotes are not protected and therefore require no reporting. Please remember, as with any use of firearms, you have to be outside city limits, use due caution, and fire only in a known safe direction. Hunting may be an effective means to solve this type of damage also. Chances are you know someone who knows someone who would like the opportunity to harvest coyote, cougar, or bear on your property. In extreme cases, ODFW can authorize the use of dogs (usually Wildlife Services agent under USDA-APHIS) to catch an offending cougar or bear.

What about snakes? The only poisonous snake native to Oregon and found in the wild is the Western Rattlesnake. These snakes are generally not aggressive and if left alone will not bite people. A great majority of rattlesnake bites occur either when a snake is being handled in some way, or accidentally stepped on by an unknowing person. The best way to guard against a snakebite is to educate yourself and your family members to identify rattlesnakes and to leave them alone. If you are trying to keep them out of your yard you can build a small solid fence that is snug to the ground and at least two feet tall. Snakes are attracted to moist cool areas in the hot dry summer months and this includes your watered lawn and shaded areas under your deck, house, or woodpile. If you have a snake that will not leave on its own, it can be removed or made to leave by someone with experience handling rattlesnakes. Rattlesnakes can be killed by private citizens if it becomes necessary. All other snakes native to Oregon are incapable of seriously harming a person and can be safely removed from the area with a stick, shovel, or broom.

Meadow voles (field mice) gofers and moles are also pests that frequently cause problems in orchards, pastures, backyards and many other settings. Control methods include poisons, traps and predators, management of cover and sanitation. Each method has it own set of challenges. Poison baits can work well for gofers and mice, but can include the unintended poisoning of predator species, household pets and even children if not used correctly. Traps work well for mice, gofers and moles, but need to be checked and baited frequently. Use of predator species such as raptors offers a natural alternative but requires the establishment of nesting sites and perches or cover for the four-footed predators to encourage them to use the area. It is important to remember that if you do encourage predators to use your area, that they can also prey on family pets and livestock too. Other controls such as the elimination of protective cover near crops and buildings will help discourage field mice. Sanitation is also a good tool in discouraging field mice. Like with skunks and raccoons, eliminating food sources such as pet food, birdseed, etc., will discourage field mice in and around buildings and in fields. Oregon State University Extension Service has several excellent publications available concerning field mice, gofer and mole control around the home and farmstead.

If you come across injured or abandoned wildlife, in most cases, it is best to let nature take its course and not to disturb the animal in question. First, it must be determined without a reasonable doubt that the animal is orphaned or injured to the point that it will not survive on its
own. If the animal is considered to be native to the area and not part of an over abundant population, or is State or Federally recognized as a species of concern, it could be a candidate for rehabilitation. There are private licensed rehabilitators that can work with most kinds of animals if their facilities have the space available. If you can be certain that the animal is suffering from a soon to be fatal wound you can, as humanely as possible, put it out of its misery. This is legal for concerned citizens to do, just make sure that you immediately inform local ODFW, or Oregon State Police personnel of the circumstances involved. You may not take the animal into your possession.

Animals that ODFW does not have jurisdiction over are livestock, stray pets, already dead animals, or migratory birds, which includes, waterfowl and most 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. If there is a larger animal that is impeding traffic on a public roadway under county or state jurisdiction, they may be able to send someone out to remove the animal. If you have a larger animal dead on your property, and you have a place to bury it or just pull it down wind from your house, that is going to be your best option. You can also spread lime on the carcass to assist decomposition and reduce odor.

As with any situation dealing with wild animals, there are an infinite number of problems and solutions, so here is a quick flow chart that may help you figure out whom you can contact for help or advice.

**Technical Resources**

(Note, numbers and websites deal primarily with Oregon wildlife agencies)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Problem Animal</th>
<th>Contact Agency</th>
<th>Initial Contact Phone #</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wild free ranging Big Game Species: Deer, Elk, Antelope, Bighorn Sheep, Bear, Cougar, Bobcat</td>
<td>OR Department of Fish &amp; Wildlife (ODFW)</td>
<td>541-296-4628</td>
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Raccoon, Beaver, Fox, River Otter, ODFW: with contact numbers for Local ODFW office Badger, Rabbit, Chipmunk, Squirrel, private animal control business 541-296-4628 Skunks, Opossums, Reptiles, or permit to trap yourself Amphibians

Gophers, moles, field mice in crops OSU or WSU Extension Office Wasco County Extension and around homes and farmsteads 541-296-5494 Upland Birds: Quail, Chukar, Huns, ODFW 503 - 947 - 6286 or Pheasant, Grouse, Wild Turkeys Local ODFW office 541-296-4628

Livestock: Cattle, Domestic Sheep, OR Department of Agriculture: 503 - 986 - 4681 Horses, Chickens, Pigs, etc. Brand Inspector 541-296-1012 www.oda.state.or.us (Auction Sales Company) Domestic pets: Dogs, Cats, etc. County animal control officer Wasco County Animal Control Office, 541-296-5189


Additional Resources
The WSU Klickitat County Extension Office and the Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District have plans to build nesting boxes for owls and perches for raptors. The WSU Klickitat County Extension Office phone number is (509) 773-5718 and the Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District phone number is (541) 298-8559 ext. 3. WSU also has a number of good wildlife management publications and you can access them through their web site at: http://cru84.cahe.wsu.edu/cgi-bin/pubs/index.html

OSU Extension Service has a number of publications relating to identification and control of voles (field mice), gofers and moles as well as publications relating to reducing deer damage through repellents and fencing. You can also access OSU Publications through their web site at: http://eesc.oregonstate.edu/

There is also an excellent web site put out by the University of Nebraska titled “The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management” that has a host of publications and hints on handling wildlife damage issues. The web site can be found at http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu/

Those wanting to rent or buy live animal traps can often find them at local feed stores. They are currently available in The Dalles.