



Controlling Raccoon Damage

Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are common throughout much of the United States and are important furbearers. In the wild, they prefer living near streams, rivers, lakes and marshes, and they require trees, brush and other cover. They usually make their homes in hollow trees, logs, rocky crevices or abandoned armadillo holes.

Raccoons are opportunistic feeders, taking whatever is available. Fruits, berries, acorns, insects, fish, mollusks, grasshoppers, mice, birds, snakes, eggs and crayfish make up the bulk of their diet. They also feed on corn, sorghum and other cultivated farm crops.

Raccoons are intelligent and can adapt readily to living in close association with people. They are very common in urban areas, but since most of their foraging is done at night, they often go undetected. In urban communities, raccoons live virtually any place that offers protection. The most common sites are in attics and chimneys, or under houses and woodpiles. Since raccoons are omnivorous, there is a wide variety of food available to them in urban areas. Dog and cat food, fruit trees, vegetables in home gardens, and trash can garbage supply an easy meal.



Biology and Reproduction

Adult weight: 10 to 30 pounds.

Total length: 26 to 38 inches.

Color: Grayish brown body with black mask across face and black rings around the furred tail.

Feet: Five elongated toes.

Gestation period: 63 days.

Litter size: Three to five.

Numbers of litters: One litter per year, usually born in February or March.

Life Span: Up to 12 years.

Damage

Raccoons can cause considerable damage. In rural areas, they may raid poultry houses, feed on farm crops, and may kill young lambs and kid goats. In urban areas, damage occurs mainly to attics and roofs, but other damage may include ruining gardens, eating fruit on trees, digging up yards, or exposing people or pets to transmissible diseases. Several different types of parasites and diseases affect raccoons such as fleas, ticks, lice, roundworms, tapeworms, distemper, tuberculosis, mange and rabies.

Control Methods

Trapping

Trapping is the most satisfactory way to remove raccoons. In urban areas, it is advisable to use cage traps. This allows pets, if accidentally caught, to be released. A cage trap, either constructed or purchased from a feed or hardware store, with dimen-

sions of at least 10 inches x 12 inches x 36 inches is adequate. Bait these traps with fruit, chicken parts, sardines or meat. When placing the traps outside, using fruit for bait reduces the likelihood of catching cats or small dogs. Place the trap on a sheet of plywood or similar surface because raccoons normally dig up grass or anything else within reach and pull it into the trap.

In rural areas, leghold traps may be more desirable. Several kinds of "sets" are used successfully to catch raccoons. The dirt-hole set is one of the best. Set the trap about 1/2 inch below the ground, 1 or 2 feet from the side of a trail, and cover it lightly with sifted soil. Cover the trap pan with a piece of tissue or canvas before sifting dirt over it to prevent dirt from getting underneath and locking the trap open. Dig a small hole, about 6 inches deep and 3 inches across, at a slant just behind the trap. Raccoons are attracted to a dirt hole set with a gland lure in the winter and early spring, and with a food lure the rest of the year. Both lures are available from trapping equipment suppliers. Be sure the trap chain is fastened securely to a stake or drag.

The cubby set is useful especially in winter because it protects the trap, but it may be used in any season. Make a triangular "house" with large sticks or small logs about 1 foot high and 2 feet deep. Cover the top with boughs or sticks and leaves. Hide the trap just inside the open end and place the bait behind it. A cubby set also may be built with two open ends, with a trap in each end and bait in the middle. Use of a drag instead of a stake is desirable so that the cubby set will not be destroyed by a trapped animal.

Water sets are popular in many places, particularly in marshy areas or along streams. The main advantage of the water set is that it is easy to place the trap without arousing the suspicion of the raccoon. Place the trap 2 or 3 inches beneath the surface and about 5 or 6 inches from the shore. Cover the jaws of the trap and trap chain lightly with fine silt; do not use bait. Attach a bright shiny object (such as a bright button or aluminum foil) to the trap pan. The raccoon's curiosity causes him to investigate the shiny object on the trap pan. Such a lure also can be used on land sets near raccoon trails.

Repellents

There are no repellents, toxicants or fumigants currently registered for raccoon control.

Prevention

Where raccoons are a problem, several things can be done to discourage them. Screen chimneys and attic and foundation vents to prevent animals from getting in or under the house. Reducing the food and water supply also helps to discourage raccoons. Feed pets in the morning and clean up all leftovers. Empty water bowls at night or place them out of the raccoons' reach. Take bird feeders in at night or place them on tall poles and away from trees.

Ordinary fencing does not keep raccoons out of gardens or poultry houses. If they cannot go under or through a fence, they climb over. However, raccoons and most other small animals may be repelled by adding a single electrified wire strand to a fence. Place the wire 8 inches from the fence and 8 inches above the ground.

To prevent burrowing beneath a fence, bury a 2-foot wire mesh so it extends 6 inches below the surface and 18 inches outward at that depth.

Remember the four basic rules for controlling raccoon damage: 1) remove food supply; 2) remove water supply; 3) modify habitat; 4) trap responsibly.

Restrictions

Raccoons are classified as furbearers in Texas; however, it is legal to trap them. Under state law, a person may trap a furbearing animal at any time if it is causing damage or creating a nuisance; however, the pelt can be sold only during the furbearer season and with the proper licenses. Other furbearers include beaver, otter, mink, ringtailed cat, badger, skunk, nutria, weasel, opossum, muskrat, fox and civet cat.

Landowners wishing to live-trap raccoons and relocate them after they have been caught must notify representatives of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

For additional information contact the nearest office of the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Service.

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