

# Wildlife and Your Pets



## Situations:

- Many wild animals, especially young ones, are brought to the WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation Center each year with injuries caused by free-ranging cats or unsupervised dogs. Sadly, many of these wild animals are too badly injured to survive. Many wildlife professionals, animal welfare advocates and conservation-minded citizens are concerned about the number of native songbirds and other small animals reportedly killed by free-ranging cats in the US each year.
- Pet guardians are concerned about keeping their pets safe from a wild animal encounter when their animals are outdoors in their own backyard or while on a walk in their neighborhood or through a local park.

## Why This Happens:

- Though our beloved companion cats and dogs may seem so gentle and “civilized” when they are curled up in our lap or next to us on the couch, they are still driven by natural instincts. Instincts such as “prey drive” -- the compulsion to stalk, chase and capture prey that developed in their species over millennia and was essential for their survival. When indoors or under our supervision, our companion-animal friends usually act upon these natural instincts by chasing a ball or pouncing on a catnip-filled mouse. But outdoors, especially when they are unsupervised, these instincts, or just simple curiosity, can cause our “civilized” friends to pursue, capture and injure or kill wildlife.
- This same prey drive is, of course, at work in predatory wild animals such as hawks, owls and coyotes and is critical in keeping them alive. When our pets go outdoors they enter the domain of local wildlife and may unwittingly be viewed, if they are small, as a potential prey item or, as in the case of larger dogs living in or walking through the territory of a coyote, as a competitor for resources.



*Young birds like this fledgling American Robin are especially vulnerable to injuries caused by cats or dogs. Photo ©Kristi Schumacher*



*“Let’s play!”*

## **FAQs and Humane Solutions:**

### ***"How can I keep my cat from injuring wildlife?"***

The best way to prevent injuries to wildlife caused by your cats is to keep your cats indoors, or under your direct supervision and control when they are outdoors. Options include taking your cat outdoors using a harness and leash, or creating a secure outdoor enclosure in which your cat can get fresh air while at the same time protecting, and being protected from, wildlife. Ready-made cat enclosures are commercially available, or you can try designing and building your own. For more information, do an Internet search for "outdoor cat enclosure."

Your cat also benefits from being an indoor cat because she'll have a much lower risk of being exposed to diseases like feline leukemia, parasites like fleas and ticks, vehicle collisions, deliberate cruelty by strangers, and to potentially toxic substances such as spilled anti-freeze, rodenticides and lawn chemicals.

[Click here](#) for information on helping your cat make the transition from roaming outdoors to being *happy and safe indoors*.

### ***"There is a stray cat that keeps coming to my yard. I have bird-feeders and I'm afraid the cat will harm the birds. What can I do?"***

Free-ranging cats often prey on birds, small mammals, and reptiles. Contact your neighbors to see if the cat belongs to one of them. If it does, ask the neighbor to keep the cat indoors for the sake of the birds and for the cat's own protection.

If the cat does not belong to any of the neighbors, you may live-trap the cat and take it to your local animal shelter. There they'll be able to scan the cat to see if it has an identification microchip implanted just under the skin between its shoulders. That micro-chip has the cat's guardian's name and contact information stored in it. If the cat is micro-chipped, the shelter staff should be able to get in touch with the cat's guardian and reunite them. If the cat is not micro-chipped, the shelter will likely keep the cat for several days as a stray in the hope that the cat's guardian will claim it. If the cat goes unclaimed and is put up for adoption, you may want to consider adopting the cat yourself!

For City of Milwaukee residents interested in learning more information about humanely dealing with feral cats in your neighborhood, please see <http://www.wihumane.org/services/tnr>

Thoughtful bird-feeder placement can allow a bird more time to react to the presence of a cat. Place feeders at least six feet off the ground and at least ten feet away from shrubs or other potential cat hiding places. Install a baffle (often sold to keep squirrels and raccoons from climbing bird-feeder poles) on the feeder pole to keep a cat from getting to a bird at the feeder. Another option would be to put a see-through mesh fence around the bird feeder area, adding an additional "speed bump" to impede a stalking cat. You could also consider purchasing a [Scarecrow](#)® motion-activated sprayer. This motion activated sprayer connects to your garden hose so when a cat or anything else walks in front of the Scarecrow it squirts them with a harmless but frightening burst of water.



*©Photo by Shay Sherfinski*



*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. ©Photo by Wm. Franson*

***"My dog has had altercations with wildlife in our backyard when I let her outside at night to go potty. What can I do to prevent this from happening again?"***

*You can help keep your dog and wildlife safe by using this method:*

1. Install a floodlight that fully illuminates your dog's potty area. Before letting your dog out after dark, turn on the light and visually check the yard for wildlife. You'll probably be able to do this from your doorway, without having to go outside. Keep the light turned on while your dog is outdoors.
2. Before letting your dog out, make some noise at the door to give any wildlife that might be present an audible "heads up." Depending on how close your neighbors are, you may be able to rattle the storm door or say something to let any wildlife that may be present hear the sound of your voice. Before letting his dog, "Badger," outside at night, our Wildlife Director, whose family lives in a rural residential area with widely-spaced homes, actually calls out of his door "Look out, wild critters, here comes Badger!"
3. Rather than let your dog out unrestrained ("off-leash"), install a sturdy "screw-eye" or other anchor-point near your door. Attach one end of a plastic-coated cable with a leash-clip on each end to this anchor point. ([Click here](#) to shop for one on our website.) Clip the other end of the cable to your dog's collar and let her go outside to "do her business." The cable should allow you to have some measure of control over your dog if she should encounter a wild animal in your yard. You should be able to stay on your porch and use the end of the cable attached near your door to pull your dog away from a wild animal without having to walk out in the yard to try to break up the altercation.
4. If you much prefer to keep your dog off-leash, we recommend that you accompany your dog outside to help discourage wildlife from getting too close.
5. Ideally, keep an eye on your dog when she's outdoors at night, even if she's on a cable -- that way if an altercation with a wild animal should occur, you will be close by to be able to quickly intervene.

For an added layer of protection, **consider installing a fence** that is **at least six feet high** around your dog's exercise area. The bottom of the fence should go down to ground level or even below it to discourage animals from digging under. Wooden fences with vertical slats are typically harder for animals like raccoons and coyotes to climb over than are chain-link or horizontally-slatted fences.

***"I've heard that a raccoon in my neighborhood was sick with Canine Distemper. Will my dog get Canine Distemper if the sick raccoon was in my yard?"***

Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) seems to be endemic in raccoons in Milwaukee County, so we often get calls about sick raccoons in people's yards and in parks. Canine distemper is spread by airborne droplets (from a sick animal coughing or sneezing), and by direct contact with bodily fluids such as saliva, or in droppings. So do not feed your pet outdoors or let wild animals eat or drink out of your pet's food or water bowls.

Raccoons suffering from canine distemper are usually lethargic, apathetic, walking in circles, and having muscle spasms and seizures. As the name implies, dogs are able to get sick from CDV. But canine distemper vaccine is highly effective in preventing your pet from contracting CDV. **Check with your veterinarian to make sure your dog stays up to date on her vaccinations.** Please direct any questions you have about your pet's health to your veterinarian.



*When "Badger" goes out after dark he goes out on a 15' cable clipped to a sturdy screw-eye in the door frame*

***"I like to let my dog run off-leash when we're in the park. I know there are ordinances that say dogs have to be kept on a leash, but mine enjoy running so much, what's the harm?"***

We get in many wild animals each year that have been injured by free-ranging dogs. Your dogs can get in a great run and you can stay compliant with community and county leash laws by **taking your dogs to a designated dog park for their run**. Leash laws are in place for a variety of reasons: to help protect your dog from getting lost; to help protect your dog from injury, such as might occur if he runs out into the street; to protect other park-goers from having their activity (e.g. picnicking, bird watching, running) intruded upon by your free-ranging dog; protect other people and their dogs from being accosted or even bitten by an unfamiliar dog; to help control dog waste in public areas; and last but not least, to protect wildlife from being chased and possibly harmed by free-ranging dogs.

***"There is a coyote in my neighborhood. Will it hurt my dog?"***

[Click here](#) for specific information on how to protect your pet from interactions with coyotes.

***"My dog found a rabbit's nest. What should I do?"***

[Click here](#) for specific information about this topic.

***"My cat/dog found a bat in our house. What should I do?"***

[Click here](#) for specific information about this topic.

***"I keep my cats strictly indoors, and my dogs are always supervised when outdoors, so I don't need to have them vaccinated against rabies, do I?"***

Talk to your pets' veterinarian about this. Unless there is some medical reason why your pets should not be vaccinated, we recommend that even indoors-only cats and dogs\* be kept current on their rabies vaccinations. Why? Because even though you may keep your animal-friends indoors, sometimes wildlife finds a way into your home. For example, we get many calls each year from people who have found a bat in the living space of their home. While the vast majority of bats are healthy, a bat found in a home where they may have had contact with pets or people is a cause for concern due to the potential for unrecognized rabies exposure. Please see our page, ["I've found a bat. What should I do?"](#)

\*In Wisconsin, state law requires that dogs over the age of 5 months be vaccinated against rabies and receive the necessary periodic boosters: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/95/21>



*A suburban coyote. © Photo by Jeff Miklitz*



*Big Brown Bats sometimes roost in attics, and from there accidentally wander into the living space of homes.*



***"My dog got into a scuffle with a wild animal in our yard tonight. I managed to pull my dog back into the house, but what should I do now?"***

Look your dog over carefully for injuries. Even if your dog seems to be uninjured or only has minor injuries, we recommend you contact your vet as soon as possible to get their recommendations. If your vet can't be reached, contact a local veterinary "animal-emergency center."

Also contact your **local municipal or county public health department** as soon as possible. Based on the circumstances, if the animal is available, the health department may want to submit the animal for rabies testing. If the animal is deceased, you may be asked to place it in a plastic bag and refrigerate it or keep it in a relatively cool place while awaiting a decision about the need for rabies testing.

If the wild animal is alive and appears to be sick or injured, if it is safe for you to do so, you can contain the animal and call a local, licensed wildlife rehabilitator for help. Please see the page, "[Sick or Injured Mammals](#)" on our web site for tips on safely containing an animal.

***"My dog had an encounter with a skunk last night and got sprayed! What's the best thing to use to get rid of the skunk smell?"***

While there are some commercial "de-skunking" preparations available, a very effective skunk-odor removing solution can be made by using three common household products: 3% hydrogen peroxide (available at any pharmacy), 1/4c of baking soda, and one tsp. of liquid dish soap.

**Suggested procedure-**

- To help keep the skunk odor out of your house, if possible, **keep your dog out of the house** until he's been deodorized. Wear disposable vinyl or nitrile exam gloves and wear old clothes to help keep the odor off of you.
- **Check your dog's eyes**, if they appear to be red or irritated, he may have been sprayed in the eyes. Contact your veterinarian, and gently rinse the dog's eyes with lukewarm tap water.
- Wash the dog as soon as possible, ideally within an hour of being sprayed. This should help make it easier to remove the skunk odor.
- In an OPEN CONTAINER mix one quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide, 1/4c of baking soda, and one teaspoon of liquid dish detergent. **DO NOT put a cover or cap on the container and do not attempt to store this solution: it could explode!!**
- Wet your dog thoroughly with this solution but DO NOT GET IT IN THE DOG'S EYES. Work the solution through the dog's fur with your gloved hands so it penetrates the dog's coat.
- **Leave the solution on your dog for about five minutes**, then **rinse thoroughly with warm water**.
- Repeat if needed.
- Towel-dry your dog and keep him in a warm place until his fur dries completely. For long-coated dogs you may wish to use a blow-dryer.



*Virginia Opossums are often seen foraging in suburban and even urban areas, especially at night. Photo © Elwood Stoker*

***If you live in Milwaukee County and your cat or dog has injured a wild animal, please call us (414) 431-6204 for advice. If you live outside of Milwaukee County, you can find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area by using this map on the Wisconsin DNR web site***

***<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/directory.html>***



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*The Wisconsin Humane Society is a charitable organization that depends entirely on donations to fulfill its mission to create a community that values animals and treats them with respect and kindness. Your support for the WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation Center makes possible the distribution of information like this to thousands of people who request it each year, and makes possible the humane care of over 5,000 injured, sick, and orphaned wild animals from our community each year. You may **donate online** or by mailing a check to the following address: WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, 4500 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53208*