

Tips to keep wildlife on the outside of a home

By Carol Singleton

Have you ever woken to the sound of a scampering animal in the ceiling above your bed or been startled by a strange scratching noise in your walls? If so, you understand the frustration of having wildlife take up residence in your home. Skunks, squirrels and raccoons are among the common culprits that end up inside people's homes and businesses. These unwanted visitors can cause extensive property damage and transmit diseases to people and pets.

The key to keeping wild animals out of your home and off your property is to make your home an unwelcome place for wildlife. Start by walking around your home looking for any holes where wildlife may enter or spaces where they may nest. Even the tiniest holes should be fixed, as bats, mice and other small animals can squeeze through cracks as small as one-quarter inch.

Before you begin boarding up areas around your home, make sure that there are no animals or active nests inside. Other wildlife-proofing steps include:

- Block any access points around your home and outbuildings where wildlife may enter.
- Block access under stairways and decks and fill any holes around your foundation.
- Fix tears in window screens and vents and cover any openings under your eaves.
- Install a chimney cap.
- Trim trees a minimum of 4 feet from your roof to avoid jumping animals.
- Remove woodpiles, debris and low-growing, dense plants

- such as ivy that provide potential habitat for wildlife.
- Never leave pet food or water outside.
 - Clean up fallen fruit and bird seed and tightly cover compost piles.
 - Keep barbecue grills clean and never leave food or trash out in the yard.
 - Make sure that garbage cans and recycling bins are secured.

It is unlawful to disturb the nests of songbirds as well as threatened and endangered species, so proceed with caution when you find a nest or burrow. CDFW also discourages the use of poison baits (rodenticide) to control rats, mice and other rodents as this can result in secondary poisoning to pets and other non-target wildlife such as owls, hawks and bobcats. Animals that eat dead or dying rodents that have consumed these baits will also be poisoned.

If you choose to trap nuisance wildlife, it is important to know the rules. You must release the animal immediately or kill it in a humane manner. You may wish to hire a pest control specialist to do this for you. According to the Fish and Game Code, it is illegal to relocate wildlife without a permit to do so.

People often think the most humane thing to do is to release the animal in a nearby park or woods, but this simply moves the problem to someone else's backyard. Also, relocating wildlife can lead to the spread of disease, cause conflicts with other wildlife and may result in injury to the person transporting the animal.

Carol Singleton works for California Department of Fish and Wildlife.