



## Backyard **Wildlife**

Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

### **Do Not Feed the Wildlife**

If wild animals have taken up residence in or under your house, wait until they have vacated and then exclude them (take the measures mentioned below to discourage them from returning). Young are often present in the spring, summer, and early fall, so be careful not to separate them from their parents. Be patient—the family will move out on their own when they are old enough to do so. If you do not wish to wait for animals to leave on their own, make their surroundings less inviting. Turn on a bright light and leave a radio tuned to a talk show near their den site. It is most effective to deploy as many deterrents as possible at the first sign of a problem.

If young are not present, you can exclude adults while they are outside the house. Exclude nocturnal animals such as bats while they are out feeding at night, diurnal animals such as squirrels during the day. Set up a one-way door or stretch a piece of plastic across the entrance. Avoid trapping young inside; they will be unable to use the one-way door and their mothers cannot return to care for them. Only when you are certain activity has ceased and all the animals are gone, close the opening permanently.

Outdoors, you can use visual repellents such as mirrors, flags, and strips of metallic tape. Olfactory deterrents create scent barriers but you must reapply them after rain.

### **Solve Existing Problems**

#### **Do Not Feed Backyard Wildlife...**

Although many people think they are helping animals by feeding them, the opposite is usually true. Feeding encourages wild animals to become dependent on handouts that are not part of their normal diet, to lose their fear of humans, and to congregate in unnaturally large groups, increasing the chances of disease transmission.

- If you feed birds during the winter, place feeders where they will not attract other animals.
- Do not offer wildlife the bounty of your garbage. Use sturdy trash cans with secure lids, thoroughly rinse bottles and cans for recycling, and put food scraps in closed bins instead of open compost piles.
- To avoid attracting raccoons and opossums, do not feed your pets outside. If you must put dog or cat food outside, do so only during the day. Clean up leftovers afterwards and take dishes in overnight.
- A garden is a great feeding site for wild animals. If you grow it, they will come. So keep your garden enclosed with appropriate barriers. Harvest fruits and vegetables as soon as they are ripe.

**In New Jersey, trapping and relocating wildlife is illegal.**

## About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:

[www.mercercountyparks.org/facilities/wildlife-center](http://www.mercercountyparks.org/facilities/wildlife-center)

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.



throughout our state. These animals live in the forests, along waterways, in parks, and in our backyards. With our ever-expanding development, wild animals are left with less and less habitat and are coming into greater contact with humans. While some people take delight in seeing the variety of animals, others consider animals in their backyard to be a nuisance. People often resort to removal methods that are not only harmful to the animals but are ineffectual in solving the problem.

Fortunately, there are humane, long-term, and effective ways to deal with unwelcome wildlife. The guidelines in this fact sheet will help you coexist peacefully with wild animals.

Have a problem with a specific animal? Search our website for one of our species-specific “Coexisting with...” fact sheets or call us. There are humane, long-term, and effective ways to deal with unwelcome wildlife.

### ...or Provide Shelter

- A building in poor repair is an invitation to wildlife.
- Animals can squeeze into small spaces, so seal holes and cracks in and around the foundation of your house. Check for openings under the eaves, along the roofline, and in the attic. Replace old shingles on the roof. Skirting the foundation and covering holes with hardware cloth may be necessary to prevent animals from gnawing through the repairs.
- Prevent entry through chimneys by capping them and vents by installing screens.
- Branches that hang over your house are easy routes to the roof and windows. Prune these branches and, to prevent animals from climbing trees from the ground, remove lower branches and wrap metal cylinders or cones around the trunk at least three feet from the ground. Remove brush piles from your yard and store wood off the ground.
- Deny wildlife easy access into buildings by weather stripping around doors and windows. If you install a cat or dog door, select one that is opened by an electronic signal from your pet's collar, or keep the door closed at night.

### Prevent Problems from Recurring

Once animals have left, be sure not to invite others to take their place. Have you removed all sources of food and water? Have you closed off all available shelter sites?

### Think Natural!

Nature provides its own ways of maintaining balance in the environment. You can help by:

- Planting bird-friendly flowers and shrubs. The same birds that visit these plants also help control the insects in your yard.
- Using organic fertilizers and weed killers. Organic lawn and plant fertilizers, such as compost, ground leaf litter, and seaweed, are not only safer for humans, pets, and wildlife but are also better for the environment.
- Avoid removing trees in spring and early summer.

### What About Trapping?

In New Jersey, trapping and relocating wildlife is illegal. This practice provides only a short-term solution, since other animals will take the place of those trapped, unless the conditions that attracted wildlife to begin with are corrected.

Furthermore, relocation causes stress for the animal, for young left behind, and for existing populations at the place of release.

New Jersey is the home of a great variety of wildlife—raccoons, opossums, squirrels, woodchucks, deer, beavers, foxes, coyotes, hawks, owls, and songbirds can be seen



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Check out our new website! [www.mercercountyparks.org](http://www.mercercountyparks.org)

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The Mercer County Wildlife Center is owned by Mercer County and operated by the Mercer County Park Commission with the support and assistance of Wildlife Center Friends.

Wildlife Center Friends is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization formed to support the activities of the Mercer County Wildlife Center. • [www.wildlifecenterfriends.org](http://www.wildlifecenterfriends.org)