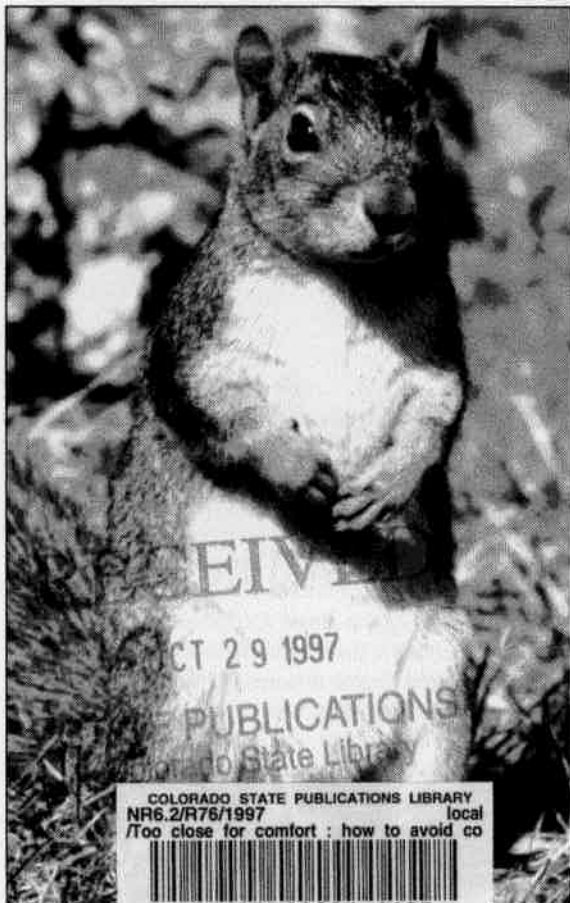


# TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

NR6.2/R76/1997

*How to avoid conflicts with  
wildlife in the city*



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**COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE**

6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216

Colorado is known for its abundance and variety of wildlife. People come from all over the world to enjoy the wildlife, from the prairie chicken of the plains to the bighorn sheep of the Rockies. To the surprise of some people, wildlife can even be found in and around the urban areas of Colorado's fast-growing Front Range.

The presence of wildlife in the cities is usually a delight to Colorado residents. The close proximity, however, of wildlife sometimes causes problems. Most people agree that a porcupine in an apple tree, a family of skunks under the front porch or a squirrel in the fireplace can be unsettling. Many people encounter these situations; yet few know what to do about them.



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## Avoiding wildlife conflicts

As cities along the Front Range grow and subdivisions impact wildlife habitat, wild animals are often displaced. Some species continue to live in open space areas, parks, undeveloped parcels of land, river bottoms and on or near bodies of water. Others have adapted well to urban living; skunks and raccoons, in particular, seem to thrive in and near cities.

In most situations, people and wildlife can co-exist. The key is to respect the *wildness* of wildlife. Wildlife is just that – wild. Most dangerous and potentially harmful encounters occur because people fail to leave the animals alone. Wildlife should not be harassed, captured, domesticated or – in most cases – fed. Intentional or inadvertent feeding is the major cause of most wildlife problems. It is illegal to feed deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, antelope and elk in Colorado.

# An Ounce of Prevention

The key to avoiding problem wildlife encounters is keeping unwanted wildlife out of homes, buildings and yards. Here are some tips:

- Do not feed wildlife. Feeding songbirds is okay, but be aware it may attract other animals. Place bird feeders where they are not accessible to other wildlife species. Wild animals are capable of finding plenty of food on their own.

- Cover window wells with commercially available grates or bubbles, or make a cover yourself using quarter-inch hardware cloth or chicken wire.

- Close holes around and under the foundation of your home so that animals will not be tempted to homestead. Bury wire mesh 1 to 2 feet deep in places where animals might gain access.

- Don't give wildlife the opportunity to get into your garbage. Store it in metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep the cans in a garage or shed, and put trash out only when it's scheduled to be picked up.

- Keep pet food inside.

- If birds are flying into windows, mark them with strips of white tape or with raptor silhouettes.

- Fence gardens and cover fruit trees with commercially available netting to protect your harvest.

- Screen fireplace chimneys and furnace, attic and dryer vents, and keep dampers closed to avoid "drop-in" guests. Chimney tops should be screened from February to September to prevent birds and animals from nesting inside. To prevent fire and safety hazards, check with a knowledgeable source before attempting this.

- Seal all cracks and holes larger than a one-quarter inch in diameter to keep out rats, mice, bats and snakes.

## Bats

- Exclusion is the best policy in preventing bats from gaining entrance into buildings. It isn't always easy, though, because of their size. Bats can squeeze through cracks as narrow as an inch wide. Some of their preferred entrances are in older frame structures where boards are loose or have shrunk. They may also enter houses through loose vents, eaves, spaces



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around water pipes, electrical outlets, corrugated roofing, doors or windows.

■ Caulking cracks is most effective if applied during dry weather when cracks are the widest. Weatherstripping – which seals spaces around doors and windows – is also effective in repairing cracks.

■ If you're certain the noises in your attic are being made by bats, wait for them to leave, then seal the entrances before they return. Unfortunately, you'll need to do the work at night when bats depart for their nightly feeding forays. It's also wise to do this in the fall after the young have learned to fly. Or, wait until winter when many bats have migrated south. Never handle a bat that appears sick or wounded.

■ Bats can be helpful in your neighborhood because they consume a lot of insects and usually do not pose a health threat to humans.



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## Geese

■ Geese are attracted to areas with open water and large expanses of grass, such as golf courses, parks and large apartment complexes. The problem is most noticeable during winter when large numbers of migrating geese join year-round residents.

■ Do not feed geese. Feeding compounds the overpopulation problem and invites disease.

■ Fence your yard. Eliminate some of the large expanses of lawn by planting shrubs and other visual barriers.

■ During fall and winter, noise-making tactics may discourage these birds from staying on your property. Also, remove old nests during this time to stop geese from returning in spring.

■ The Division of Wildlife helps control the population by rounding up molting geese in summer and transporting them to states that hope to increase their goose population. In residential areas, homeowners' associations must request trapping. Contact the DOW to have geese removed.

# Deer

■ If you see a deer-crossing sign, slow down and drive cautiously for the length of the crossing – especially at night. Remember, if you see one deer on the road, at least one more may be nearby.

■ When deer appear in or around the city, it's usually best to leave them alone. In most situations, they will move to new areas. Deer and other large animals are usually injured or killed when people try to capture them in developed areas. In fact, tranquilizing deer, elk and other large animals is done only as a last resort.

■ In areas where deer are common, shrub and tree damage may be a problem. Commercial deer repellents or mixtures containing eggs have proven successful in warding off deer. However, these solutions may need to be reapplied after rain or snow. You can also keep deer from eating flowers and shrubs by putting wire cylinders and fences around the plants. Contact your local CSU Cooperative Extension office to learn what plants deer avoid (phone numbers are listed on the back panel). Also, consider planting native flowers and shrubs.

■ It is illegal to feed deer in Colorado. People may be fined \$50 for doing so.

# Prairie Dogs

■ New commercial and residential developments often displace prairie dogs, causing them to wander into areas that are inappropriate habitat. If a prairie dog gets into a window well, it usually can be removed with little effort. First, try to get the animal to leave on its own by propping a two-by-four in the window well to provide an avenue of escape. If that is unsuccessful, lift the animal with a fishing net or a shovel, put it in a box and release it in a nearby prairie dog town.

Use caution and good sense when you handle or transport any wild animal.

■ Sometimes relocation sites may be available for nuisance prairie dogs. In most cases, the animals are destroyed if they continue to be a problem. Contact



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a pest control company to learn about appropriate control measures.

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## Raccoons

■ Screen chimneys and repair attic holes to prevent entry.

■ Remove overhanging branches to cut off easy access. You can also place an 18-inch cylinder of sheet metal around the trunks at least 3 feet above the ground.

■ Make sure garbage and trash containers have tight-fitting lids and are clasped or tied to keep raccoons from tipping them over. Never feed raccoons.

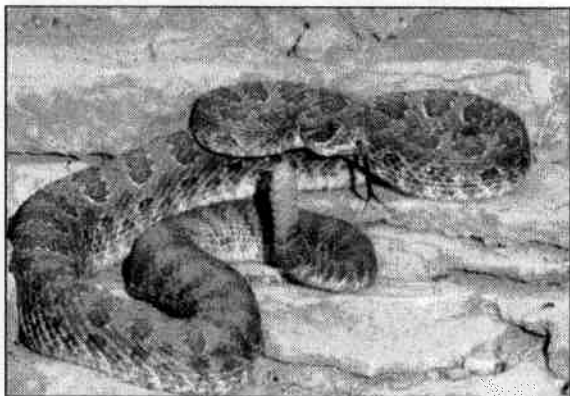
## Snakes

In Colorado, nearly all species of snakes are not only harmless but beneficial to humans because of their appetites for insects and rodents. Along the Front Range, however, there are occasionally problems with prairie rattlesnakes. Rattlesnakes have elliptical pupils, Distinctive, heat-sensing pits on each side of their face and rattles on their tail.

If you live where prairie rattlesnakes are found or if you have an aversion to snakes, some simple habitat modification around your property will usually solve the problem.

■ Keep firewood in a covered box.

■ Do not landscape with expanses of large rocks,



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especially in open sunny areas.

■ Mow weeds and vegetation, and remove rocks, boards and debris.

■ Reduce the rodent population on your property to reduce a major food source for snakes.

■ Seal entrances to crawl spaces and basements.

If you encounter a prairie or massasauga rattlesnake (the only poisonous snakes in Colorado), simply back off. The snake senses your presence by your body heat and movement. In Colorado, rattlesnakes may be legally killed if they pose a threat. All other snakes are classified as nongame wildlife and are protected by law.

## Skunks

■ Keep them out of house foundations and basements by burying wire mesh 18 inches underground around these structures or by using concrete or sheet metal to seal likely access points.

■ Sometimes you can drive skunks away by putting a nylon stocking full of mothballs or ammonia-soaked towels under the house (be sure to attach a long string so you can remove them later). Cover the ground at the entrance with soft soil or flour. When you see tracks leaving the entrance, close the entrance with hardware cloth (check after 10 p.m. or first thing in the morning). If no more tracks appear near the inside of the entrance, permanently seal the hole. Caution: Don't use this method if children are playing in the area.

■ If you decide to trap a skunk, you must destroy the animal because state health laws do not permit relocation of skunks.



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## Squirrels

■ Do not feed squirrels. Place bird feeders on a tall pipe so squirrels cannot reach them.

■ Screen attic vents on the inside with hardware cloth to keep squirrels out. Trim branches hanging over buildings.

■ If a squirrel is loose in the house, block off the room it's in, provide one

way out (open a window or a door) and watch until you see the squirrel leave.

■ If you discover a squirrel in a fireplace, close the damper immediately. Then, open the doors or screen slightly and use a hand-held fishing net to capture the squirrel. Cover the net opening with a board and take the animal outside for release.

■ If a squirrel is in a stove fan, disassemble the fan and, as you remove it, hold a fishing net under the hole. Then follow the previous procedure for taking the animal outside. When handling any wild animal, use caution and appropriate protection, such as heavy gloves.

■ Prevent squirrels from climbing trees by placing 18-inch metal cylinders on tree trunks.

## Woodpeckers

In Colorado, the common flicker is the most abundant woodpecker species. It can be found drumming on wood siding, eaves and shingles of homes. These birds are territorial; drumming marks their territories and attracts mates. Woodpeckers also drill holes for nesting and roosting. These birds are protected by law. There are a number of different techniques you can use to discourage their activities.

■ Provide an alternative drumming site. Nail two boards together at just one end (producing resonance) and hang on a secure surface.





■ Place lightweight plastic mesh netting at least 3 inches from affected wood areas.

■ Nail plywood over the excavated area.

■ Hang aluminum foil strips, colored plastic streamers, hawk silhouettes or mirrors near the affected wood.

■ Treat wood with sticky/tacky repellent.

However, be aware these repellents may stain house siding.

■ Use noise-making tactics, such as clapping your hands or banging garbage can lids together.

■ Spray the birds gently with water from a garden hose when they start to drill or drum.

■ Eliminate any ledges or cracks on which the woodpecker is able to stand while drumming.

■ Don't feed birds.

If woodpeckers continue to be a problem, a special permit can be obtained from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to destroy the birds.

## Wandering Pets Spell Trouble

Dogs are a two-fold problem for wildlife. When left to roam, they form packs and harass or kill wildlife. This is especially true in mountain and foothill subdivisions. A pack of dogs – well fed or not – often kill or mutilate deer and domestic livestock. Also, dogs and cats left unattended – even in a fenced yard – serve as potential food for coyotes and mountain lions.

Be aware of the potential predators in your area. Keeping a dog inside a fenced yard won't necessarily prevent an attack. It's best to keep your dog in a covered kennel or inside your home. In more urban areas, keeping your dog in a fenced yard will usually prevent problems. Respect other people's space and keep dogs under control. In Colorado, law enforcement officers are authorized to destroy dogs seen chasing wildlife and fine the pet owners.

Cats become part of the food chain when allowed to roam. They are easy prey for mountain lions, coyotes and foxes. The presence of free-roaming cats can cause predators to remain in areas where they may not be welcome. Also, cats prey on small, ground-dwelling wildlife and birds. Keep cats under control, especially during the spring bird-nesting season.



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## The Young and The Restless

During spring and summer, people often encounter young animals in urban areas, the mountains and the plains. In all cases, the rule of thumb is: **LEAVE THEM ALONE!** Deer, elk and other mammals often leave their young while feeding, relying on the young animals' natural camouflage to protect them. Don't assume that just because you don't see the parents, the young have been abandoned.

In cases where newly hatched birds have fallen from their nest, return them to the nest if you can do so safely. Or, place them on a high branch to keep them away from pets.

Keep in mind that when young birds begin to fly, they often spend time on the ground before they perfect their flying skills. If this appears to be the case, leave them alone and let them learn. There are very few cases of "abandoned" wildlife. If you are absolutely certain the parent animal is dead (hit by a car, for example), mark the location on a map or measure the mileage from a landmark and report it to the Division of Wildlife.

# Wildlife Laws You Should Know

Wild animals are fascinating creatures to observe. While they are intriguing to some and hopelessly cute to others, they do not make good pets. Wild animals are difficult to keep alive in captivity. Moreover, they usually cannot fend for themselves if they are confined for any length of time and later released. For these reasons, it is **illegal** in Colorado to possess most species of native wildlife.

Despite the fact that wildlife is best left alone, there are instances when people pick up injured or orphaned wildlife. If this does occur, call the Division of Wildlife. It is illegal to attempt to rehabilitate injured or orphaned wildlife without state and federal permits, and the Division of Wildlife will put you in touch with a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area.

## Litter and Wildlife

Countless birds, especially ducks and geese, are injured or killed in Colorado every year because of thoughtless people who litter. Discarded plastic six-pack holders, fishing hooks and fishing line are all potentially lethal to wildlife.

Plastic six-pack holders can get wrapped around the necks of birds. Because these birds can still swim and fly (making them almost impossible to catch), they often die of starvation.

Fishing equipment, too, is a fatal form of litter. Hooks often cause serious injuries to the eyes and beaks of birds. Fishing line can get tangled around the birds' limbs and cut off circulation.

To ensure that you aren't responsible for these types of injuries, please pack your trash and dispose of it properly.



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# Helpful Numbers

If you have a wildlife problem, call the nearest Division of Wildlife office during regular business hours, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Colorado State University Extension offices can assist in solving residential wildlife problems. Call (303) 271-8980 (Denver) or (970) 491-7093 (Fort Collins) for help, or your local extension office.

For emergencies after hours or on weekends, call the State Patrol headquarters at (303) 239-4501. Or, you may want to contact your local law enforcement agency.

Pest control agencies that specialize in wildlife can assist with many problems for a fee. Look in the yellow pages under pest control to find a company to help you.

## Colorado Division of Wildlife Offices

Division of Wildlife Headquarters: (303) 297-1192

Northeast Regional Service Center: (303) 291-7227  
6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216

West Regional Service Center 711 Independent Ave. Grand Junction, CO 81505 (970) 248-7175	Ft. Collins Service Center 317 W. Prospect Rd. Fort Collins, CO 80526 (970) 484-2836
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Montrose Service Center 2300 S. Townsend Ave. Montrose, CO 81401 (970) 249-3431	Southeast Service Center 2126 N. Weber St. Colorado Springs, 80907 (719) 473-2945
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CSU Cooperative Extension  
15200 W. 6th Ave.  
Golden, CO 80401  
(303) 271-8980 (Denver)  
(970) 491-7093 (Fort Collins)

Colo. Dept. of Agriculture  
Rodent Control Section  
700 Kipling, Room 1100  
Lakewood, CO 80215  
(303) 239-4157

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
DFC Building 16  
Denver, CO 80225  
(303) 236-7878

