

WILDLIFE INFORMATION ON RACCOONS



Raccoons are common throughout California. They are medium-sized animals 12-45+ pounds and 20-45 inches long, including a bushy tail with 4 to 7 black rings.

Raccoons breed mainly in February and March, but matings may occur from December through June. Most litters are born in April or May, but some late-breeding females may not give birth until June, July, or August. Raccoons produce one litter per year. The average litter size is 3 to 5 young. The offspring are weaned between 2 and 4 months and usually stay with the female until the following spring.

The diet of raccoons is extremely diverse. They will eat fruit, berries, grain, eggs, poultry, vegetables, nuts, mollusks, fish, insects, rodents, carrion, pet food, and garbage. Individual animals may learn to eat specialized foods such as poultry, fruit crops, small livestock, or garbage by watching other raccoons. Contrary to popular myth, raccoons do not always wash their food before eating, although they frequently play with their food in water.

Raccoons are nocturnal or night-time active animals. Urban raccoon populations are frequently underestimated because people seldom see them traveling during the daytime. They are also territorial, particularly the males. Adult males may

occupy areas of 3 to 20 square miles; females have a much smaller territory of 1 to 6 square miles. Raccoons den up in hollow trees, drain pipes, homes and buildings, under decks and storage buildings, brush piles, and abandoned burrows.

Raccoons can cause substantial damage. In urban areas, raccoons damage buildings (particularly attics and roofs), gardens, fruit trees, lawns, garbage cans, and trash containers. They are also attracted to pet food left outdoors and will attack pets. Occasionally, one or more raccoons will establish a communal toilet area resulting in time to the deposition of a large number of scats. Raccoons are also serious predators of wild bird populations. Reports indicate that raccoons have been responsible for eliminating local populations of some nesting waterfowl.

Since free roaming wildlife does not receive veterinary care, all wildlife species can carry diseases and parasites. Raccoons are known carriers of rabies, canine distemper, encephalitis, histoplasmosis, trypanosomiasis, coccidiosis, toxoplasmosis, tularemia, tuberculosis, listeriosis, leptospirosis, roundworms, and mange. They are also infested with fleas, ticks, lice, and mites which are known transmitters of disease. Children and pets are particularly at risk.

Raccoons are attracted to urban areas by the easy accessibility of food, water, and shelter. Reducing or eliminating the availability of these factors will encourage raccoons to leave. Tight fitting lids should be kept on garbage cans; pets should be fed during daylight hours and any leftovers removed immediately; water bowls should be emptied or taken in at night; gardens should be frequently harvested and windfall fruit picked

up. Food should never be intentionally left out for wild mammals.

Careful attention to prevention of wildlife conflicts is the simplest, most economical, and humane course of action. A periodic inspection of buildings with two or more stories can help immeasurably. Raccoons are good climbers, and they may gain access to roofs using overhanging branches, television towers, and downspouts. Pay particular attention to eaves, deteriorating boards, warped siding, loose shingles, and areas where the roof and house join. Toilet areas may be seen on roofs or in attics. It is important to avoid unprotected contact with any fecal material found. Replace worn, curled, cracked, or missing shingles. Cover chimneys with approved chimney caps. Inspect and repair any attic openings with one-half inch, heavy-duty, rust-proof hardware cloth. Trim overhanging branches and remove unused TV towers. Remove leaves from roofs and gutters to prevent wood rot.

Raccoons are classified as furbearers in California. Fur harvest regulations are set by the California Department of Fish and Game which prohibits the relocation of raccoons and other wildlife without written permission of the Department.

Westminster Animal Control emphasizes peaceful co-existence with our indigenous wildlife. If you have any questions regarding how to cope with our wildlife, please contact Westminster Animal Control at (714) 898-3315 extension 365 or you can visit the Humane Society of the United States website at www.hsus.org or the United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website at www.aphis.usda.gov for downloadable information and materials.



Service with Integrity

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