

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Spring 2009

Not all Spring babies are welcome

It's wildlife reproduction time, and depending on the species, that can mean problems for some homeowners.

Skunks and raccoons are the most common "nuisances" as they find crawl spaces, outbuildings, and other nooks and crannies to set up housekeeping for their babies to come.

Squirrels, rabbits, moles, marmots, snakes and bats are among the other species preparing to raise families that are potential nuisances around human homes.

If some of these new families are not what you had in mind for your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary, think about what's attracting them and remove those attractants as soon as

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Photo courtesy of Red Creek Wildlife Center

Crossing Paths is a quarterly newsletter for Washington residents enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program and others interested in urban/suburban wildlife.



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Crossing Paths Newsletter

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Wildlife rehabilitators often swamped with babies that don't need your help

It's hard to resist "rescuing" a baby bird, bunny, or other young wildlife that ends up on your lawn, driveway, or porch at this time of year.

After all, you've created a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary that invites wild animals to share your home space. So the least you can do when a baby seems helpless or abandoned is to scoop it up out of harm's way.

The key word here is "seems."

Most wild babies that end up being brought to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) offices or to WDFW-licensed wildlife rehabilitators are NOT helpless or abandoned. In fact, most "rescuers" unwittingly stole the young animal from its parents, some who may have even witnessed the well-intentioned abduction.

"Every Spring hundreds of baby birds, deer fawns, seal pups

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Celebrate birds at local festivals

The annual International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), this year on May 9, is being celebrated with several bird-watching events in Washington on or around the date.

Festivals on May 9 include:

“Purdy to Paradise” in the Green River Watershed of Tacoma, sponsored by the Tahoma Audubon Society; for more details see <http://www.tahomaaudubon.org/birdathonfieldtrips.com>

9th annual Backyard Festival at Tukwila Community Center, 12424 42nd Ave. S., Tukwila; see <http://www.backyardwildlifefair.org/>

IMBD at Marymoor Park, 308 4th Ave., S., Kirkland, sponsored by Eastside Audubon Society; see <http://www.eastsideaudubon.org>

IMBD at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, southwest of Cheney in Spokane County; see <http://www.fws.gov/turnbull/>



Other events later in May include:

7th annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest, May 14-17; for more information and to register see <http://www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com> or call the Leavenworth Chamber of Commerce at 509-548-5807

Festival for the Birds at Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, May 16; for more information see <http://www.zoo.org/events/all.html>

IMBD at Seward Park, Seattle, May 23, sponsored by Seattle Audubon Society ; for more information see <http://www.seattleaudubon.org/>

See www.birdday.org

for details on the origins of this annual celebration.

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possible to avoid problems.

The number one attraction for females of many species at this time of year is a warm, dry, easily defended area that makes a good den or nest. Close up spaces, including basement window wells, areas under porches and decks, garage and shed entries of even the smallest dimensions, roofing gaps, uncapped chimneys and vents, and attic rafters.

A close second for lots of wildlife is an easy food source.

Keep pet food and water and garbage inside.

Fence gardens and secure compost piles.

Clean up feed spilled on the ground from bird feeders, or discontinue feeding altogether for now.

If it's too late for these preventive steps and animals are already in place and causing problems, you may need to remove them. If you want to attempt it yourself, check out “Evicting Animals from Buildings” in WDFW’s “Living With Wildlife” series on the website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/evicting.htm>.

If you'd rather hire someone to take care of the problem, any WDFW office can refer you to a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator (NWCO). Although they must be licensed through WDFW, and conform to its regulations, they are not state employees. They operate as private enterprises and set their own fees. Under the authority of their permit, NWCOs can trap, capture, and transport

raccoons, opossums, skunks, and other wildlife year-round. For more information, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/hiring.htm>.



Avoid conflicts with potentially dangerous wildlife



Washington's warm weather seasons bring people and wildlife together, and sometimes not in a good way.

Virtually any species of wildlife can potentially be a problem, depending on the situation, but a few are considered potentially dangerous – black bears, cougars, coyotes and moose.

Bears have become such a common conflict at this time of year that May is actually national “Bear Awareness” month. The seasonal distinction is for good reason -- hungry from a long winter of hibernation, black bears are active now as they forage on new, green growth in south-facing mountain meadows, or on virtually anything else they can get their paws on. And they have such an incredible sense of smell, they'll sniff up that bird seed in your backyard feeder or that tuna fish sandwich in your hiking pack from a long way off.

Outdoor recreationists and those who live in bear country (which is much of Washington state) need to keep clean properties and camps to avoid drawing bears to food or garbage. That's the number one way to avoid conflicts with bears, which usually avoid people but are driven by their need to feed.

Most confrontations with bears are a result of surprise encounters at close range, so take precautions

to avoid startling a bear. Their size, strength and surprising speed make them potentially dangerous. When hiking or working in bear country, make your presence known and stay in groups.

Sows could have winter-den-born cubs in tow now, so especially keep a respectable distance to avoid problems with curious youngsters and protective mothers. If you do have a close encounter, avoid direct eye contact but talk and wave your hands to identify yourself as human, then move away slowly and give the bear an escape route.

For more about co-existing with black bears, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/bears.htm>.

Cougars are far less common in Washington (probably about one for every ten black bears), and by nature they are far more secretive. But rare as it may be, a conflict with a cougar can be extremely dangerous, particularly if a cougar has mistaken you or your domestic animals as prey.

If you live in wooded foothills where deer or elk (a cougar's most common prey) are abundant, take precautions to avoid problems – keep pets indoors or in secure kennels at night, bring livestock into enclosed sheds or barns at night, avoid feeding wildlife of any kind or landscaping with plants that draw deer close to your home, and supervise children playing outdoors, especially at dawn and dusk.

If you're recreating in cougar habitat, stay in groups and make noise to avoid surprising a cougar, keep small children close, don't approach dead animals found, especially recently killed and partially covered deer or elk, and leave pets at home.

In the very rare close encounter with a cougar, stand tall and make yourself look as big as possible, don't run, look directly at the animal and let it know in no uncertain terms that you are not prey, including shouting and throwing rocks if necessary.

For more information about co-existing with cougars, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/cougars.htm>.

Coyotes are such adaptable animals that they manage to occupy

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Cougar

Rich Beausoleil photo

Avoid conflicts with potentially dangerous wildlife, cont. from page 3



Coyote

Brad Manchak photo

almost every conceivable habitat type in Washington, from open ranch country to densely forested areas to the Seattle downtown waterfront. They are prolific, despite efforts to control their numbers in some areas, and there are estimated to be at least two of them for every black bear in the state.

In other words, of all these potentially dangerous species, you are more likely to encounter a coyote than any other. And up until a few years ago, coyotes weren't really even on the list of "potentially dangerous."

There were no documented coyote attacks on humans in Washington until April, 2006. That's when Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) officers euthanized two coyotes in Bellevue (King County) after two young children were bitten while their parents were nearby. Coyotes had also scratched and snapped at two women and charged a man in the same area. These coyotes' unusually aggressive behavior likely resulted from being fed by people.

Like with most wildlife that can become a problem, the most important thing to do is not feed coyotes – not even unintentionally. Don't leave pet food out, secure garbage, compost piles, and gardens, and pick up fruit that falls from

orchard trees and seed that spills from bird feeders. Don't leave small pets out, especially cats and especially at night. Secure chickens or other small livestock in completely enclosed pens.

For more information about co-existing with coyotes, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/coyotes.htm>.

Moose are in significant numbers only in the northeast part of Washington. But if that's where you live or recreate, there's a chance you might encounter one. And by their sheer size, they can be dangerous, even if unintentionally.

The urban and suburban Spokane area appears to have become a magnet of sorts for moose in recent years, at least in two different seasons. In late spring and early summer, cow moose seem to move to lower-lying areas near water sources to calve; yearling or older offspring that have followed Mom around are now on their own, and

that often leads to adventures in the city. For the past two winters, moose have escaped deep snow by moving into town where roads are plowed and landscaping plants make easy meals.

Moose, like any wild animal, can feel threatened by and fearful of people. Although with their long legs they could outrun us, they are not built for speed like deer and will often choose "fight" over "flight" to escape a situation. A charging moose often kicks forward with its front feet, knocking down the threat, then stomping and kicking with all four feet. Antlered bulls can use their racks just as lethally. Moose can be aggressive any time, but in late spring and early summer, cows are very protective of young calves. And any moose at any time of the year can be aggressive towards dogs, which are viewed as predatory wolves.

Give moose plenty of space and keep dogs confined when they are around, or if you're recreating in moose country. And like with all wildlife, never attempt to feed or approach one.

For more information about co-existing with moose, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/moose.htm>.



Moose

FAQs: Rabies in wildlife

Some of the most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about urban/suburban wildlife fielded by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologists are about rabies.

WDFW wildlife biologist Ella Rowan, assistant to State Wildlife Veterinarian Dr. Kristin Mansfield, answers the top five.

What wildlife species in Washington carry rabies?

Any species of mammal can contract rabies and die from it, but only a few are actual vectors. The virus is found in an animal's saliva and nervous system, and it usually passes from one animal to another via a bite wound. It may be possible to contract the virus through a scratch or mucous membrane contact, but this would be extremely difficult and a rare occurrence.

Within Washington, the primary vectors for rabies are bats, but it is estimated that less than one in 10,000 bats has the virus. No other wild animal species has been found with rabies in Washington. Within the United States, other potential vectors include coyotes, raccoons, skunks, fox, and other carnivores.

What symptoms might suggest a rabid animal?

Rabies is an impossible disease to diagnose just by looking at an animal's behavior. The disease shares symptoms with other diseases such as distemper; therefore, the only way to be certain an animal has rabies is to have it tested.

Some symptoms may include loss of fear of humans, aggression, lethargy, loss of appetite, loss of ability to drink (may lose ability to swallow, which causes "foaming" of saliva), disorientation, staggering, inability to climb trees or fly (bats), emaciation, and many others.

How should people avoid getting rabies from wildlife?

The best way to avoid contracting rabies is to avoid handling wildlife species that may be vectors. Professional wildlife biologists, zoo

employees, and others who regularly handle wild animals are educated about the risks and proper protection equipment. Wildlife biologists who handle rabies vectors are vaccinated against rabies for additional protection.

Cats and dogs should be vaccinated against rabies to protect themselves, as well as family members who can contract the disease should their pet become infected. Cats and dogs may become infected if they bite, or are bitten by, a rabid bat. They may find the sick bat on the ground outside, where it is easily accessible.

Bats can occasionally make their way into homes where doors are left open, or that are not well sealed from the outdoors. Sheds, barns and attics are also frequent roosting sites for bats. Bats can fit through very tiny openings, as small as one-half inch.

Children may contract rabies due to their innate curiosity and ignorance of the dangers of touching wild animals they find on the ground. They may also lack the ability to tell a grown up that they were bitten.

The rabies virus cannot live outside the body for very long, so people need not be afraid of wild animals sharing their yards with their pets, or touching objects that the owners will touch at some point.

What should you do if you have contact with what might be a rabid animal?

If the animal is a potential rabies vector (bat, raccoon, skunk, fox, badger, cat, dog) and it has bitten or scratched you, attempt to capture and confine the animal -- if that's possible without being further injured -- and call your local animal control authority. Seek medical attention immediately (within one day) and explain all the circumstances to the doctor. You may need to receive post-exposure rabies treatment as a precaution. If animal control authorities can retrieve the animal, it may be possible to test the animal for rabies. Testing still requires euthanizing the animal so that brain tissue can be examined. Recent

advances include tests that don't require euthanization, but the possibility of the test being wrong is still too great to take chances, considering this virus is lethal.

How common or rare is rabies transmission to humans from wildlife?

Wild animals are the most important potential source of infection for both humans and domestic animals in the U.S. Between one and three people become infected every year.

Since 1950, 50 people in the U.S. have contracted rabies directly from wildlife species, primarily bats, coyotes, raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes. Two of those cases were in Washington in the 1990's, both from bats, although one case involved a person who had no recollection of encountering bats.

The majority of human cases of rabies over the past few decades have been attributed to variants of rabies carried by bats, but many victims did not remember being bitten by a bat. This means there may have been an intermediate vector (cat, dog, other wildlife species) that actually bit the person.

Only one human is known to have survived rabies without having been vaccinated prior to being bitten, and all vaccinated survivors also received extensive post-exposure treatment.

In the early 1900's, dogs were the primary vector for rabies. Now it is very rare for cats and dogs in the U.S. to become rabid, thanks to pet vaccinations. Domestic animals such as cats, dogs, cattle, horses, sheep, and goats have tested positive for rabies, but their numbers remain relatively low. Cats accounted for most of the rabid domestic animals in 2007 (274 out of 482 cases in the U.S.), and this may be due to cats being left outdoors and their tendency to kill or fight with wildlife that may be sick with rabies.

Outside of the U.S., approximately 50,000 people die every year due to rabies. Most of these cases occur in developing countries (India, Africa, Middle East) and are caused by rabid dogs.

Wildlife rehabilitators often swamped with babies, cont. from page 1

and other young wild animals are referred to our wildlife rehabilitators,” said WDFW wildlife biologist Patricia Thompson, who coordinates the state’s 70-some volunteer rehabilitators. “This can be extremely harmful to the young animal and costly to rehabilitators when they most need to concentrate limited resources on truly orphaned or injured wildlife.”

Thompson explains that young wild animals are often left alone for hours while their parents gather food. Young birds commonly leave the nest before they are fully-feathered and are fed on the ground by their parents for a day or two until they are able to fly. Doe deer leave their fawns alone to avoid drawing predators with their own body scent.

“These wild babies are being tended by their parents in ways that are best for their survival and for retaining their natural wild behaviors,” she said. “If they lose their wild behavior under human care, they usually can’t be truly rehabilitated for release back into the wild, and often must be euthanized.”

More often than not, Thompson says, just leaving a young animal alone affords it the best chance for survival.

Leaving wildlife alone includes confining cats, dogs and other pets that might injure it. One of the most common causes of injuries to wildlife that are legitimately in need of rehabilitator care is attacks by cats.

One of the few situations in which almost anyone can help wild babies is when very young, completely un-feathered birds have fallen out of the nest and are on the ground.



Photo courtesy of PAWS

If you can find the nest and safely reach it, simply pick up the nestling with a gloved hand and put it back in the nest. Contrary to popular belief, the parent birds will not reject their young because it’s been handled by humans.

If you can’t find the nest, place the bird in a tree or shrub or on a shaded portion of a roof, out of the way of cats, dogs, and children. You can even make a “nest” for it with a small box filled with leaves, paper towels or soft cloth; place the nestling in the box and place the box in a tree or shrub or otherwise protected from rain or sun. Do not unnecessarily handle or move it from the general area where it was found.

If you watch from a distance, you’ll likely witness the parent birds tending to their lost-and-found young.

Wild animals of any age that show obvious signs of illness or injury such as bleeding, vomiting, panting, shivering, or ruffled feathers or fur, or that are just lethargic and make no effort to escape your approach, may indeed be in need of care.

“That’s why we developed the volunteer wildlife rehabilitation program,” Thompson said. “As a state agency with broad responsibilities and limited staff, we

manage wildlife populations rather than individuals. But we recognize the valuable role that wildlife rehabilitators play in caring for individual sick, injured, and truly orphaned wildlife.”

Most Washington counties have wildlife rehabilitators, now conveniently listed with phone numbers and addresses for 24-7 access on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife/rehabilitation/index.html>.

Thompson encourages careful observation of a wild animal before calling a rehabilitator and before attempting to pick it up and stressing it further. If the wild animal seems truly at risk, consult with your closest rehabilitator about next steps.

“You may not be able to reach one of these volunteers immediately, or they may not be able to help you at all, especially during spring and summer when they are swamped,” she said. “If they can help, you will probably have to transport the animal to them.”

If you and your local rehabilitator decide it might be best to help the animal, find out from them how to safely contain and transport the animal. Always wear gloves when picking up a wild animal to place it in the container. Until the animal is transported to the rehabilitator, keep it in a quiet, dark place.

Another way to help wildlife, whether or not you find an injured animal in need of care, is to support your local volunteer wildlife rehabilitators.

Thompson explained these volunteers must learn wildlife rehabilitation techniques and standards and pass a comprehensive test and facility inspection before

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Wildlife rehabilitators often swamped with babies, cont. from page 6

obtaining a state permit. The permit authorizes temporary possession of injured, diseased, oiled, or abandoned wildlife for the purpose of treatment and wild release. Each sick and injured animal taken in must be evaluated, diagnosed, and treated through a program of veterinary care, proper diet and medication, physical therapy, exercise, and pre-release conditioning.

Many of these volunteers are veterinarians themselves, and all must establish and maintain a good working relationship with a cooperating veterinarian, but none can charge for their services to wildlife.

“Our wildlife rehabilitators volunteer their services and facilities and pay expenses out of their own pockets,” Thompson said. “We offer grants for partial reimbursements, but most are reliant on donations to cover expenses. Typically their finances and time are limited and demand is great.”

Thompson also noted many wildlife rehabilitators are involved in educating both children and adults about responsible relationships with wildlife and the environment.

“Next time you are truly in need of a wildlife rehabilitator, remember that they are trained individuals performing a service basically out of the goodness of their heart and the love of wildlife,” she said.

Those interested in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator can check out the requirement details at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife/rehabilitation/how_to_become.html and contact Thompson at 425-379-2302.

So far so good for western bats, but watch for signs of disease

Bats in Washington and the rest of the west have so far escaped the deadly disease that is killing bats in the northeast part of the country.

But bat enthusiasts everywhere are advised to avoid visiting bat-roosting caves to minimize spreading the disease, and to watch for signs of the disease so any spread can be identified.

The alert is not a concern for human health. There is no known risk to humans from White Nose Syndrome (WNS), as the disease is called after the white fungus found on the noses and wings of dead or dying bats. WNS appears to spread from bat to bat, but it might also be spread by humans transporting fungal spores from cave to cave.

The concern, explains Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) wildlife biologist Howard Ferguson, is for the welfare of our bats here in Washington and elsewhere in the country.

“Little brown bats and big brown bats have been among the species affected by this disease in the northeast,” he said, “and those are among the most common of our 16 species in Washington. The eastern big-eared bat has also been infected and that gives us concern for our own unique and relatively rare western big-eared bat.”

Up to one million bats of six species have died from WNS in New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey,

Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia since the winter of 2006-07 when it was first found in New York .

Federal and state researchers have associated WNS with a newly identified fungus (*Geomyces* sp.) that thrives in the cold and humid conditions of caves and other winter hibernation locations or “hibernacula”. Bats affected don’t always have obvious fungal growth, but they display abnormal behavior in late winter and spring, including:

- flying during the day in temperatures at or below freezing;
- clustered near the entrance to hibernacula; or
- dead or dying bats on the ground, buildings, or trees.

If you find dead or dying bats, contact WDFW locally or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov, to report your observation.

As with all wildlife, use protective gear (disposable gloves, double plastic bags, etc.) and good personal hygiene (thoroughly wash hands and clothing that might come in contact, etc.) if you need to dispose of a dead bat.

For more information, see: http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html, <http://www.fort.usgs.gov/WNS/>, and http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/index.jsp .

Releasing butterflies can harm Washington's native wildlife

It looks like a harmless, uplifting way to end a wedding or other ceremony, but the popular practice of releasing mail-ordered butterflies could leave a legacy of lasting damage, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologists warn.

The biologists' chief concern is that released butterflies could decimate their native counterparts here by introducing disease, competing for food and altering survival behavior by interbreeding with them.

Many of the state's native butterflies already are under pressure because their native habitat is vanishing -- one species already is on the state's endangered species list, another is recommended to be added to the list of threatened animals and 12 more are candidates for state protection listings.

"This activity has the potential to do a lot of damage, and I don't think the people doing it realize that," said WDFW wildlife biologist Ann Potter.

Released butterflies generally are mail-ordered or purchased over the Internet from out-of-state dealers, and may originate from far-flung locations in North American or



Painted lady butterfly

a staple of schoolroom science projects. Releasing non-native animals of any kind teaches a poor lesson, Potter said, because their effect on the local environment is unpredictable and potentially devastating.

Examples abound of non-native fish, animals and plants which overrun their new settings because they lack natural predators. Potter cites the case of the gypsy moth, introduced in Massachusetts in the 1800s by silk producers eager to improve the vigor and productivity of their silk worms. The introduced moth has gone on to cause widespread damage to forest land and has prompted widespread

pesticide spraying.

Butterflies are especially vulnerable to introduced intruders because native butterfly populations are small and localized to specific areas. Introductions of even a few non-local butterflies of breeding age could "swamp" the natives, Potter said.

Wild, migratory butterflies which spend part of the year here also could be harmed if they bred with introduced butterflies and their offspring lost their migratory instincts.

abroad. Businesses are supposed to have a state Department of Agriculture permit in order to sell them to state residents.

In addition, a WDFW permit is required to release wildlife and that includes butterflies. The Department must evaluate the potential damage such releases can cause.

Ceremonial butterfly releases are a relatively recent but increasingly popular custom. In addition, mail-ordering butterflies for students to raise and release is becoming

This program receives Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is the policy of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to adhere to the following: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the WDFW ADA Coordinator at 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, Washington 98501-1091 or write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of External Programs
4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 130
Arlington, VA 22203



