

Wildlife (Birds, Ducks, Bats, Coyotes, Opossums, Raccoons, Skunks, Snakes, Squirrels and Wildcats)

Costa Mesa Animal Control gets many calls about injured wildlife. There are organizations in Southern California that are dedicated to the rehabilitation of displaced or injured wildlife. We recommend that you not make an attempt to remove or rescue any injured wildlife without first contacting one of these groups, or Costa Mesa Animal Control. For a list of these organizations, go to www.dfg.ca.gov/wmd/rehab/forms/facilities.pdf. For Costa Mesa Animal Control response, call Animal Control Dispatch at 714-754-5674.

All wildlife is protected by the California Department of Fish and Game. Information on the above-listed species of wildlife will be included in this section. For more information on various wildlife topics, please visit the California Department of Fish and Game website at www.dfg.ca.gov/coned/living.html or contact them at 858-467-4201.

There are several things you can do to make it less likely for any wildlife to become a nuisance. You may need the cooperation of your neighbors to make your efforts more successful.

1. Store trash bags in containers. Make sure containers are covered and securely latched.
2. Keep pet food indoors and do not leave food of any kind outside.
3. Eliminate all fallen and rotting fruit from fruit trees.
4. Check fencing and eliminate any possible point of entry.
5. Check home foundations, eaves and vents and seal any possible point of entry.
6. Clear any dense vegetation and debris from your property.

BATS

Bats are nocturnal mammals that are often mistaken for low-flying birds at dusk or dawn. They are very important to our ecosystem for many reasons, among them insect control, seed dispersion and plant pollination.

Bats have been known to transmit Rabies although the vast majority of bats are not sick. You cannot tell if a bat has Rabies simply by looking at it; it must be tested in a laboratory to obtain a positive diagnosis. **If you have been bitten by a bat, seek medical advice or attention immediately.** The following are recommendations to diminish the risk of transmission:

1. If you encounter a bat on the ground or floor, especially during daylight, do not touch it with your bare hands. Use leather work gloves or a thick towel. Cover it or gently put it in a box and leave small holes in the top so that it can breathe. Do not kill the bat. It may simply be injured, as can be the case with very young bats that fall from their roost. Call Costa Mesa Animal Control at 714-754-5674 for pickup.
2. Teach children not to touch any strange animals. Children should be taught this at a very early age due to their natural curiosity and willingness to "help" an animal that appears to be hurt.
3. Inspect your home yearly to check for and seal holes through which bats can gain access. Any hole bigger than ½ inch should be caulked. Garage vent screens, attic screens and chimney caps should also be used.
4. Keep Rabies vaccinations current for cats and dogs. If you suspect that your pet has had contact with a sick bat, contact your veterinarian immediately.

WILD BIRDS

Costa Mesa Animal Control will respond to calls regarding injured wild birds as well as dead birds found on city property. Please call 714-754-5674 for this service. Dead birds found on private property can be disposed of by placing the bird in a plastic bag while wearing gloves and depositing in your garbage.

If you wish to report a dead bird that you suspect may have West Nile virus, you must first contact Orange County Vector Control at 714-971-2421 to see if birds in our city are currently being tested. If the testing approval is granted, you may call Costa Mesa Animal Control for pickup.

If bird nuisances are occurring, they more than likely have a continual food source such as someone feeding the birds, bird feeders nearby or uncontained garbage, whether residential or

commercial. It is imperative in these cases to eliminate all access to their food and water sources. This includes never overfilling garbage bins and ensuring that the lids are always secure. If you have a roosting problem with a large flock, you can contact the California Department of Fish and Game South Coast Region at 858-467-4201.

If you find a wild baby bird out of its nest, please contact a wildlife rehabilitator before attempting to rescue the bird. There are circumstances where moving a bird will do more harm than good. A trained wildlife specialist will be able to advise you on the best course of action. Please call Costa Mesa Animal Control at 714-754-5311 for the names and phone numbers of wildlife rehabilitators in our area or visit www.dfg.ca.gov/wmd/rehab/forms/facilities.pdf.

If you have encountered a raptor (bird of prey) that appears to be injured or ill, please call either the Orange County Bird of Prey Center at 949-837-0786, or Costa Mesa Animal Control at 714-754-5311. What birds are raptors? Owls, eagles, falcons, condors, hawks, ospreys, kites and vultures are all raptors. Please do not attempt to care for an orphaned raptor; it is illegal to do so as state and federal laws protect them.

COYOTES

Coyotes are found in all areas of Orange County and throughout California, from desert and mountain habitats to urban areas. Coyotes are far from domesticated but seem to survive and flourish in the urban setting. They are a critical component to our ecosystem and observing all wild animals is one of the benefits of living near Orange County wildlife habitats. Costa Mesa has no eradication or relocation programs for coyotes. The following suggestions are provided to help reduce conflicts with coyotes:

1. Protect children. Although rare, coyote attacks involving children have occurred. Never leave small children unattended in areas frequented by coyotes, even in your yard. Teach children from a very young age to avoid strange animals.
2. Never feed a coyote. Deliberately feeding coyotes puts you, your neighbors and pets at risk. You may be inadvertently feeding coyotes by leaving pet food dishes and garbage where they can get to it. Store bags of pet food inside. Make sure trash containers are covered and securely latched. Leaving garbage in bags alone is an invitation to scavengers like coyotes to rip them open and scatter the contents. Remove fruit that has fallen to the ground. Clear brush and dense weeds from your property to make the area less attractive to rodents, a good food source to a coyote.
3. Protect pets and livestock. No pets, especially small animals, should ever be allowed to run loose. Besides being a city violation, loose pets are easy prey and some coyotes even seem to seek out cats in residential areas. De-clawed cats in particular are no match for a coyote because in addition to losing their first line of defense, it is much more difficult for them to climb anything to escape an attack. Coyotes are especially agile and can easily scale a residential fence so backyard pets should have consideration, too. Bring small dogs inside at night and keep all dogs under close supervision. Rabbit hutches should have a solid bottom; a hutch standing above ground with only a wire mesh bottom makes your pet rabbit a very easy target.

If you see a coyote behaving aggressively or attacking people, contact the California Department of Fish and Game at 858-467-4201 or their 24-hour dispatch center at 916-445-0045. Costa Mesa Animal Control is also available for emergency response at 714-754-5674.

DUCKS

Ducks are common in our city and sometimes take up residence in a backyard or are seen crossing a busy street with their new brood. Ducks are protected by federal law and cannot be bothered or relocated without a special permit. This means that steps should be taken to prevent uninvited nesting before the mating season begins, which is from late February into August each year. The following are some suggestions to discourage ducks from making a backyard area a nesting site:

1. Cover swimming pools when not in use, especially during nesting season.
2. Allow beach or pool balls to float on the surface of ponds or fountains.
3. Clear away foliage from around water sources to eliminate a protected nesting area.
4. Enclose above ground decks with skirting to eliminate another possible nesting site.

If you need a referral to organizations that are licensed to work with ducks, you can call 714-754-5311. If you need the assistance of an Animal Control Officer, please call 714-754-5674.

For more information on the Federal Migratory Fowl Act, please visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website at www.fws.gov/birds/laws.htm.

OPOSSUMS and RACCOONS

Opossums are mainly nocturnal marsupials and do not have a permanent home base. They will stay in one location only for a short time (1-2 days) but will return often if food and shelter are readily available and there is little threat from predators. Increased opossum sightings occur between the months of February and June as they bear more young during this time. They are not aggressive and are not known to attack humans without provocation.

Raccoons can be easily identified by the black mask on their faces. They are nocturnal but like the opossum can adjust to being active during daylight hours if necessary. Raccoons are extremely nimble with their paws. They can open garbage can lids easily and will eagerly scavenge through them.

If you live within the city limits, Costa Mesa Animal Control will pick up any humanely-trapped opossum or raccoon that you wish removed from your property. Please call 714-754-5674 for this service.

SKUNKS

Skunks are nocturnal wildlife and usually not troublesome, but some can become a residential nuisance if food, water and shelter are more readily accessible close to your home than away from it. Skunks possess glands at the base of their tail that produce a strong, offensive odor. When they feel threatened, they usually warn you by stomping their front feet in agitation. With or without warning, however, they can aim and release their glands at their target. This spray can travel 10 feet.

If your pet has been "skunked", the best way to remove the smell is to bathe it. Contact a professional groomer, go to your local pet store to buy a commercial preparation, or you can try the following recipe. Keep in mind that the longer you wait to bathe your pet the harder it is to remove the smell, and a small amount of odor may still remain although in time the smell will disappear. If your pet has sensitive skin or is being treated for any skin condition, it is important to check with your veterinarian before using this or any commercial product. Avoid getting any solution into the pet's eyes.

ODOR REMOVAL SOLUTION

2 pints hydrogen peroxide (Warning-this can alter the color of some haircoats)

¼ cup baking soda

2 tablespoons liquid dish detergent

1 pint tomato juice

Mix together just before bathing your pet. Massage into hair coat and let set for 10 minutes. Rinse well.

If you live within the city limits, Costa Mesa Animal Control will pick up any humanely trapped skunk that you wish removed from your property. Please call 714-754-5674 for this service.

Skunks need to be completely secured in a solid-walled container for response from our department (e.g. the trap placed inside a covered, empty garbage can or similar method).

SNAKES

Snakes, like many other wild animals, are very important to our ecosystem. Warmer weather brings out several species of snakes in Orange County, most commonly Gopher, King and Rattlesnakes. Rattlesnakes are venomous and while they can cause serious injury to people, encounters with them within Costa Mesa city limits are very rare. It is much more common to come across a Gopher snake and mistakenly identify it as a Rattler due to the similarity of the skin color and markings. Rattlesnakes have the telltale rattle at the end of their tails and Gopher

snakes do not; but sometimes Rattlesnakes have lost the rattle, the snake's surroundings obscure the view of the rattle, or a baby Rattlesnake may only have one "button", thereby increasing the difficulty of telling them apart. A good indicator, however, is the shape of the head and body. Rattlesnakes have a heavier body and a distinct flare to the head with a narrowing at the neck. Non-venomous snakes have more tapered bodies with a rounded nose and narrower head.

If you encounter a snake at your residence, call Costa Mesa Animal Control at 714-754-5674.

If bitten by a snake, it is important to stay calm and seek medical advice or attention immediately.

For more information on snake bites, visit the California Poison Control website at www.calpoison.org/public/snakebite.html or call them at 800-876-4766.

SQUIRRELS

Squirrels are very common in our city and are enjoyable to watch. They feed on seeds, nuts, fruit, vegetables and insects, among other fodder. They occasionally become a nuisance because like other chewing animals, they can damage ornamental and potted plants, wood, and insulation. They can also enter our homes through attic vents and other access points. Costa Mesa Animal Control gets many calls from citizens asking what can be done to control them.

If you feed squirrels, know that feeding even one may attract many! While this may be enjoyable for you, it might be a problem for your neighbors. Even if they are not deliberately fed, squirrels may get a meal if you or your neighbors have a bird feeder, as they are quick to figure out a way to access this food source.

Feed stores or garden centers may sell squirrel-proof bird feeders and other squirrel deterrent products or know where they can be purchased. Remove other food sources, such as fallen fruit from trees.

For squirrels that are getting into your home, it is wise to check your house every year for possible points of entry, paying particular attention to foundations, eaves and attic vents. Some points of entry can be blocked by installing a heavy-gauge wire mesh over the access area.

If you want to get rid of squirrels on your property you can contact a pest removal company that works with squirrel problems. You can also humanely trap and relocate them within a 5 mile radius of where they were trapped or call Costa Mesa Animal Control during normal business hours at 714-754-5674 to pick up the trapped squirrels. Some feed stores and hardware stores rent or sell the humane traps.

WILDCATS

Mountain Lions and Bobcats live in Orange County and are occasionally seen in urban areas although sightings in the Costa Mesa area have been rare. Bobcats mainly feed on smaller animals such as birds, rabbits, rodents and reptiles. Mountain lions can hunt these and also larger animals like deer. Both cats have been known to kill domestic livestock.

One of North America's largest cats, a Mountain Lion is generally about 7-8 feet long from head to tail. It has a smooth, tawny-colored hair coat with black-tipped ears and tail. An adult male can weigh between 120 and 150 lbs. while an adult female tends to be smaller at 65-90 lbs. Mountain Lion cubs (kittens) have spots and stripes on their hair coats that fade as they mature.

Bobcats are much smaller than their Mountain Lion counterparts, weighing in at about 15-30 lbs. They have large ears and paws and a cropped tail that measures 6-7 inches long. Their tan hair coats are slightly longer with a distinct lynx pattern—black / brown spots and stripes.

Like any wildlife, wild cats can be dangerous and attacks that have occurred by mountain lions are being analyzed in the hope that they can be avoided in the future. The following suggestions are based on studies of mountain lion behavior and analysis of attacks by mountain lions, tigers and leopards.

1. Do not hike alone. Go in groups, with adults supervising children and keeping them close by and within your sight at all times.
2. Do not approach a lion. Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
3. Do not run from a lion. Running may stimulate a lion's instinct to chase. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. If you have small children with you, pick them up if possible so they don't panic and run. Although it may be awkward, pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.
4. Do not crouch down or bend over. A person squatting or bending over appears to look a lot like a four-legged prey animal. If you are in mountain lion country, avoid unnecessary squatting, crouching or bending over.
5. Do all you can to appear larger. Raise your arms; open your jacket if you are wearing one. Throw stones, branches or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice. The idea is to convince the mountain lion that you are not prey and that you may be a danger to it.
6. Fight back if attacked. Wildcats have been fought off with stones, sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools and bare hands. Since a mountain lion usually tries to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the animal.

For more information, please visit the California Department of Fish and Game's website at www.dfg.ca.gov/news/issues/lion.html.