

Co-Existing with Native Wild Animals: Blurred Lines

The City of Carpinteria is nestled between the coastline of the Pacific Ocean and the inland foothills of the Los Padres National Forest. Residents and visitors enjoy the mild climate and weather. This unique environment attracts humans and animals for many of the same reasons. As the human environment grows, more and more pressure is placed on the surrounding natural environment to adapt. Many times, the boundary between the natural and human made environment is blurred. This results in sometimes enjoyable encounters between nature and people, but can also lead to situations that are less pleasant. Many times, the unpleasant encounter involves animals entering a person's "private" space or property. This private space could be a home, a backyard or even a public park. For wild animals, these human made boundaries do not exist. For wild animals, there is no difference between a natural habitat and a town or city.

In Carpinteria, within a short ten-minute walk or even shorter bike or car ride, you can visit the Carpinteria Salt Marsh, Tar Pits Park, Bluffs Nature Preserve or the Franklin Trail which



enters the foothills. In these brief moments, you will certainly encounter creatures of all types; from the Harbor Seal Rookery, where during the winter and spring hundreds of seals come to raise their young, to the Bluffs Nature Preserve where you can often see hawks, kites and other predatory birds hunting in the chaparral.

We live, work and play in an environment that provides the opportunity to interact with nature. We also have the responsibility to interact and respond to nature in a way that respects the natural environment.

Blurred Lines

Most anyone who interacts with wild animals in nature appreciates the animals' capability to move freely and their ability to find shelter or food. Once that natural area crosses a human made boundary, say for example, a property line or a fenced area, the interaction between the animal and the

human changes. The animal is no longer a spectacle to be admired and is now a pest or a nuisance; the animal is a threat. The animal has crossed the blurred line and is not welcome.

Relocating Animals

One of the first reactions a person might have to finding a wild animal on private property would be to simply capture the animal to relocate back into nature. This results in quick removal of the nuisance animal and appears to be a win-win situation.

This scenario can play out in many different ways. Let's imagine that you walk into your backyard and encounter, for the third time, a raccoon munching on your garden tomatoes. You rent a trap from a local pet store and proceed to bait the raccoon over the next few days. Success! On the fourth night, your tempting peanut butter has enticed the raccoon into a humane trap.

You take the raccoon, gently and efficiently to a nearby trailhead and release the fuzzy bandit. But as a result, unknowingly, you have separated the raccoon from her young who were hiding in a nearby shrub while the mother gathered food from your garden. The raccoon is relocated several miles from her home, and therefore now several miles from her babies. The babies are left to fend for themselves. Ultimately, the babies now try to find food and water, and become accustomed to eating trash and dog food from your backyard and your neighbors' properties. Now, instead of a transient family of raccoons just passing through, two young raccoons have become adapted to the site and will not leave.

If instead, the raccoon was not captured, the family may have simply moved through the property to find a more natural and accommodating home.

The initial solution of relocating a wild animal seems like the humane alternative to poisoning or otherwise harming an animal. The preliminary concern disguises the negative effects that trapping and relocation can have on the animal and the surrounding habitat. This can result in very young animals perishing in the wild or being prey to larger animals.

Another negative impact can relate to the animal that is relocated. The animal is often moved to a "natural" environment that may be a great distance from the animal's previous home and range. The animal may be unable to find adequate food and water and therefore is at great risk. The animal may also be unable to find adequate shelter and can fall victim to weather and predators. Unless relocation is done by a trained professional, trapping and relocation of an animal can be detrimental to both the animal and the habitat where the animal is placed.

Alternative Solutions

Once you have determined that a wild animal is finding shelter or food on your property and is not welcome, you should remove the element that attracts the animal. In many cases, wild animals are attracted to your pet's food or water dishes when they are left outdoors. It is best to feed and water your pets indoors. If food and water remain outdoors during the day, they should be moved indoors at night. Many foraging animals are nocturnal and will only visit after dark. You should also ensure that all trash cans and waste receptacles are properly closed and secured. Trash can lids should be tight fitting and/or tied closed.

If an animal is entering

your home, garage or other structures, you should identify the points of access. Air and flood vents should be checked and repaired to prevent rodents, birds and bats from entering. You should look for cracks in the foundation or siding of the building, as many small animals can squeeze through cracks of less than one-half inch. Caution should be used to ensure that you do not trap animals or their young inside the structure. You may need to encourage animals to exit or wait until they exit on their own before the home is made impenetrable.

You should remove any outdoor debris piles which may serve as a hiding place or home for wildlife. If the pile of material cannot be removed, for example a firewood stack, you should routinely cleanup any piled leaves and materials around the wood pile to discourage long-term habitation. Wood piles or other storage should be moved away from the sides of buildings to allow you to inspect the area for evidence of animals (i.e.; excrement, food, etc.).

Trees and shrubs should be trimmed to discourage access to roofs or second floor patios. Vegetation around the sides of buildings should be trimmed back to discourage habitation of animals.

If you have chickens or other animals that are kept

outdoors, ensure that they are properly housed and caged. Chicken coops and animal enclosures can be an attractive nuisance to rodents, prey birds, coyotes and other wild animals. Cages should have well secured doors and access ways. Cage fencing should have small openings to discourage rodents. Your pet's food storage containers should be well sealed and kept indoors. If predator animals are consistently approaching the outdoor cage, you may consider housing chickens indoors after dusk to reduce predators and stress on the chickens.

Fencing can be used to discourage certain animals from accessing your property or parts of your yard. If you keep a vegetable or fruit garden, you may consider using chicken wire fencing to prevent larger animals from attacking your crops. Root barrier materials can be installed prior to planting discourage gophers and other underground critters. Many wild animals can climb and jump, so fences alone may not prevent damage to your garden.

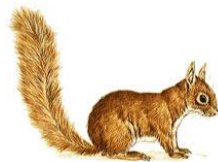
Lights with motion sensors can be used to discourage nocturnal creatures from approaching structures. Sounds or alarms can also be used to scare away animals. When an animal has made its shelter within an attic or shed, a

loud radio or other noise making device may help "evict" the animals.

Trapping and poisoning often have side effects that continue to impact our human lives once the animal is gone. Since traps can break up family units or cause damage to new environments, trapping is discouraged unless done so by trained professionals knowledgeable in local laws and habitats. Poisoning is also discouraged since it can be detrimental to other living creatures including pets, other wild animals and small children. Since most poisons

are ingested by animals, the poison can also be eaten by other creatures than those they are intended for or ingested by animals that may eat the carcass of the poisoned animal. Unless elements that attract the animal are removed, another animal may move in.

Instead of taking efficient and sometimes drastic actions to remove a bothersome animal from your property, take a moment to consider the reason why the animal is on



HUMANE SOLUTIONS in A WILD WORLD

GET SPECIES SMART Respect for those around us starts with understanding behavior, habitat and needs of our wild neighbors. Many wild animals are nonthreatening and play a crucial role in controlling insect and rodent populations. Some of these creatures, like opossums, often wander from place to place and do not make permanent dens for too long. Many of these smaller creatures pose little threat to you, your family or pets as they will often hide or flee upon detection.

HUMANELY EVICT Waiting for nesting animals to leave on their own is preferable, but the next best thing is to gently encourage them to move to a new site. Parent animals should be allowed to safely move or relocate their young. Gentle harassment techniques such as cider-vinegar-soaked rags, blaring radios and light will encourage unwanted houseguests to hit the road.

RESHAPE THE ENVIRONMENT Once animals have moved on and it's clear that no babies are left behind, animal-proofing the structures is key to preventing the entry of more furry guests. Other barriers may prove to be useful, including chimney caps, sealed porches and sheds and other barriers to re-entry.

MORE TIPS

www.humanesociety.org/wildlifesolutions

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/living-with-wildlife>

our property. Learning about the natural behaviors and history of a backyard species can go a long way to finding a balance with your natural neighbors. Although some solutions may appear to be humane and efficient, the kindest and sometimes more effective solution would be to watch, wait and enjoy the interactions with your wild guests. Since wild animals are usually just looking for food and water or a warm place to sleep, you can often simply remove such elements for a time and the creatures will move on to another site. Wild animals rarely make permanent homes close to human environments. With a little thought and patience, you might find that the most humane action is right in front of you. By feeding your pets indoors or removing a large hedge, you will make your property less inviting and the critters will move on without much effort. The same reasons you chose to live here are the same reasons your wild neighbors do too, to them there are no boundaries in nature.

Sources:

All Animals – Jan/Feb 2015

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Humane Wildlife Control

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CA Department of Fish and Wildlife

<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Living-with-Wildlife>