



## Prevention Safest Way to Avoid Wildlife Conflicts

It's spring! Birds are nesting, wildlife is on the move, and many animals are busy having young.

Landscaping with shrubs and trees and plants that provide food and shelter for wildlife can attract songbirds, butterflies and hummingbirds. Watching wildlife can be relaxing, enjoyable and educational. But landscaping can also attract wildlife that can damage ornamental plants and trees and homes or presents a danger to people and pets under the wrong circumstances.

There are many things we can do to prevent wildlife conflicts while still enjoying our wild friends.

**Bears** rarely cause problems when natural food supplies are abundant. In drought years, or when berry crops fail, bears will travel a long way to find food. Even in good forage years, bears sometimes find an easy source of human food, like garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders or bee hives.

Homes can be secured against unwanted visits from bears by removing or securing all potential food sources. Store all garbage inside a building and dispose of it regularly. Don't put garbage cans outside until the morning they are collected.

Wash garbage cans often to reduce odors. Don't bury garbage; bears are good diggers. Treat all compostable materials like other garbage – store it securely and dispose of it regularly. Don't bury pet or livestock carcasses either. Bears have been known to dig down seven or eight feet for a carcass.

Bears are attracted to pet foods, which should be stored indoors. Bird feeders also attract bears. The ground under them should be cleaned frequently. Consider feeding birds only during the winter or removing feeders when bears are

around. Fruit trees also attract bears. Fences of multiple strands of electric wire may be the best way to keep bears out.

Barbecues and freezers are open invitations to bears. Clean barbecues after each use to reduce odors and store it inside a building. Don't use a freezer outdoors. Bears can remove locked freezer doors.

**Deer and elk** winter ranges are also popular home sites. Problems usually don't occur until the animals move into

these areas for the winter, where they find ornamental trees, shrubs and livestock feeds to eat. Protect plants and livestock feeds with repellents or fencing. Deer and elk do most of their feeding at night; feeding livestock in the morning often prevents big game from feeding with stock.

Big game should not be fed intentionally or have access to livestock feeds. Feeding often starts with a few animals, but numbers can quickly become overwhelming. Animals may become aggressive and potentially dangerous to humans, pets and livestock. Feeding also attracts animals that homeowners don't want around, such as mountain lions or wolves.



A bear-safe container foils this young bear.

*IDFG photo by Craig Walker*

**Beavers** are abundant in most waterways of Idaho where their engineering skills can cause problems for homeowners.

Ornamental plants and trees along waterways can be protected by wrapping the trunks with chicken wire about three feet up the trunk. A two- to three-foot tall woven wire fence, tight against the ground, around landscaped areas also prevents beaver damages.

Beaver dams in irrigation ditches can be removed easily. Existing dams less than one year old in natural waterways affecting private property may be removed without a permit.

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Dams older than one year must be evaluated and require a removal permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**Skunks and raccoons** are primarily active at night. Though rarely seen around homes, evidence of their activities is obvious. The odor of skunk is unmistakable and raccoons are notorious for making a mess of garbage. Both live in and near towns. If one of these mischief makers find no food or possible den sites, it will probably leave on its own.

To keep skunks and raccoons from hanging around, don't leave garbage or pet food outside; seal holes under porches, decks, sheds and in foundations and crawl spaces. Remove brush, woodpiles and junk that could serve as den sites. This will also discourage rodents that may otherwise serve as a food source.

Fence gardens with mesh wire. Pick up and dispose of fallen fruit from under fruit trees promptly. Don't let pets, especially dogs, run loose at night. Skunks and raccoons are capable of defending themselves, with unpleasant results for pets.

Skunks and raccoons are easily caught alive in a trap baited with canned fish or cat food. Cover the trap with black plastic before setting it out to prevent being sprayed if you catch a skunk.

**Mountain lions** are common throughout Idaho, but they are rarely seen and will avoid most areas of human activity. Usually the only evidence of their presence is tracks in the mud or snow. Occasionally a young lion or one in poor health will appear near homes or in town. Lions can be dangerous and should be avoided.

They prefer corridors of heavy brush

during their travels. To reduce a potential mountain lion ambush, remove brush around buildings and livestock areas. A barking dog outdoors and around livestock can deter lions or alert you to their presence. If a lion appears and does not leave, keep all pets and people indoors.

Call Idaho Fish and Game or the county sheriff's office for help with a mountain lion.

**Birds** rarely cause problems for homeowners. But woodpeckers will occasionally damage wooden buildings in the spring mating season or while looking for insects.

Patch holes with caulk, wood or metal flashing and coat them with a strong solution of cayenne pepper. The pepper will sting the woodpecker's tongue and encourage it to move elsewhere. Sealing all gaps leading behind walls keep birds from nesting there.

Putting up a wooden post or attaching a board loosely to a nearby tree may entice the birds away from drumming on homes. Woodpeckers are protected and may not be killed without a permit.

Gardens and fruit trees can be protected from bird damage with chicken wire or tree netting placed over the top of a garden. To prevent flocks of starlings, sparrows and pigeons from roosting, enclose trusses in open buildings and under eaves. Trusses can also be covered with plastic bird spikes to prevent roosting. Clean up spilled grain or livestock feed.

**Bats** can enter buildings through small holes. Seal holes and gaps, especially

around upper story windows and roofs

To get rid of bats in an attic, seal all holes except one that can be sealed after they have left for the evening. To avoid trapping baby bats, do not seal gaps until early fall, after the bats have matured and migrated.

**Rattlesnakes** hunt rodents and other small animals for food. Because they are venomous, they are usually not wanted around homes, pets or livestock.

Rattlesnakes don't chase people or animals, they can't spit or throw their venom, nor can they jump off the ground to strike. Rattlesnakes almost always move to safety if given the opportunity. If not, they rattle to warn and strike to defend themselves.

They are found near rocky areas, junk piles and other hiding places. Removing such piles helps eliminate them. But look closely before picking objects off the ground.

Rattlesnakes blend in with their environment and may not be noticed. They don't always rattle before striking.

To remove a rattlesnake, get help from someone familiar with handling snakes or use a shovel to push the snake into a large bucket with a secure lid. Don't try to pick up a rattlesnake by hand. In case of a snake bite, stay calm and seek immediate medical or veterinary treatment.

Don't pick up a recently killed rattlesnake; use a shovel. People have been bitten by the reflex action of a dead rattlesnake. Before killing any snake, make sure it is poisonous. Many harmless snakes inhabit yards, providing years of free rodent control.



Plantings around homes can attract moose and other big game. IDFG photo by Mark Rhodes

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# Avoid Bear Conflicts: Store Game, Food and Garbage Properly

As the weather warms and the snow line retreats into the high country, campers, hikers, bikers and others heading out into Idaho's back country are reminded to be careful with their food and garbage.

The same cautions apply to homeowners in bear country.

"Anyone who leaves food out are actually baiting in hungry bears," said Barry Cummings, Fish and Game district conservation officer based in Deary.

"Bears have a tremendous sense of smell,

and once they get used to finding an easy food source, they'll keep coming back and problems will occur."

Tips around camp:

- Keep a clean camp. Pick up garbage and store it in a closed vehicle, bear-resistant container, or in a bag tied high between two trees. Store all food the same way. Coolers are not bear-resistant, and never keep food in a tent.

the summer months when songbirds are able to forage on food provided by nature.

- Clean up fruit that has fallen in your yard. Rotting fruit will attract bears as well as raccoons and skunks.
- Feed pets inside or during daylight hours; don't leave pet food or food scraps outside of your home or camp, as it can attract bears, raccoons and skunks.
- Store horse and livestock grains inside closed barns.
- Keep barbecue grills stored in closed buildings.



Hanging food and game meat properly can avoid bears problems. Photo courtesy: Chuck Bartlebaugh, Center for Wildlife Information.

- Don't cook near tents or sleeping areas, and never wear clothes you cook in to bed.
- Don't bury food scraps, pour out cooking grease, or leave anything that might be tasty on the ground or in the fire pit. Also, store barbecue grills or other smelly cooking gear inside your vehicle or within a sealed bear resistant container.
- Make game meat unavailable by hanging it at least 10 feet high and 4 feet from the nearest tree.
- If you see a bear, watch it from a distance and leave it alone. Black bears are not usually aggressive, but the danger may increase if a bear loses its fear of humans.

## What to do when damage occurs:

When a bear on private land has damaged property or livestock, the landowner or livestock owner should contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services and an Idaho Fish and Game official to investigate.

As soon as possible, but within 72 hours, Wildlife Services will determine whether the loss is from a black bear and determine the extent of loss without assigning a monetary value. Contact Fish and Game to begin the process of filling out a claim.

When a bear has come into a camp on public land and caused damage or acted aggressively, the individual should contact the local Fish and Game conservation officer or regional Fish and Game office as soon as practical.

A bear posing an immediate threat to life or to livestock may be killed. It must be reported within 10 days.

If a bear has been seen in the camp or immediate area but poses no immediate threat, contact Fish and Game and inform officials of the situation. For outfitters, it is important to work with Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service before problems arise so that preventative measures may be taken.

If problems still occur despite best efforts, other remedial actions will be implemented such as issuing kill permits over the phone, capturing and moving a bear, or performing aversive conditioning.

Tips around home:

- Keep garbage in bear-resistant containers or in a closed building.
- Empty and remove bird feeders during

## Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission's policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor's office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.



## Laying Low



A fawn hides in wild flowers while waiting for its mother to return.

*IDFG photo*

## Baby Animals are Better off When Left Alone

The end of May and the beginning of June is the peak fawning and calving season for Idaho's deer, elk and pronghorn; many other animals have their young at this time as well.

With campers and other outdoors enthusiasts heading out to the woods, well-meaning folks often find baby birds and other animals that seem to be abandoned. Idaho Fish and Game is asking people to leave them alone.

"We have people calling us or bringing baby animals to the office every year," said Regan Berkley, Fish and Game regional wildlife biologist for the Magic Valley Region. "Even though their intentions are good, it isn't the best thing for the animals."

Mother animals often leave their young as they forage. If they return to their

young to find people milling around, they will often leave the area and come back when the people are gone. If people have taken the baby animal, the mother will return to find its baby gone.

"If people bring young animals into the office we don't have many options," Berkley said. "We can attempt to return them back to where they were found, and hope their mother finds them, or we can see if any area zoos want them."

"During early summer, the baby is simply too young to survive on its own," she said. "Placing the animal in a zoo also doesn't always work, because zoos don't always have space for additional animals, particularly at this time of year."

If the animal is successfully placed in a zoo, it means the animal is removed from the wild forever. If neither returning

the animal to the wild nor sending it to a zoo are good options, biologists have to consider whether euthanasia is the most humane thing to do.

"Basically, the only really good option is for the baby to stay in the wild in the first place," Berkley said.

In addition, it is illegal for people to possess wild animals. People found with a wild animal without a permit can be issued a citation, and the animal will be removed from their control. Animals raised in confinement are often destroyed because of the possibility of disease and lack of ability to survive on their own.

Smaller animals, like rabbits and birds, should also be left alone. In nature, mother knows best.

For more information, call 208-324-4359 or the nearest Fish and Game office.