

Humane Officer's Corner:

The cold weather is here, and “baby season” is done. This is the quiet season for people who work around animals. This lull in the action gave me a moment to look back on the recurrent animal concerns that came up over the summer. A lot of calls had to do with stray and wild animals making themselves comfortable on our properties...and making the humans uncomfortable with their presence. This is the time of the year to do exclusionary work to keep animals away from sheds and out from under decks and porches.

Here are two inexpensive projects that can reduce nuisance wildlife problems.

- 1) **Chimney caps** are an easy fix for keeping critters out of fireplace flues. Mom raccoons find uncapped chimneys to be delightful places to raise babies. She'll den up in March and deliver several babies usually in April. No predators bother them in the chimney. No wind or rain will chill their newborns, and hopefully no humans will build a fire!
- 2) **Hardware cloth** is a very versatile product for discouraging wildlife from setting up housekeeping! This cloth is actually a mesh made of wire. The type with ½ inch squares and a stiff gauge is best for blocking off under decks and sheds. Cut the cloth and use a utility stapler to affix the cloth to the backside of the deck frame. Be sure to cut the cloth long enough to allow at least 1 foot of material to be buried in a trench around the underside of the deck. Backfill the trench with gravel and dirt. If there is concrete under the deck, the wire can be stapled to landscape timbers laid along the underside perimeter of the deck. Mama skunk will not appreciate this lack of hospitality and will keep looking for a more welcoming den site! This will also discourage woodchucks, opossums, cats and ground squirrels.

The reason live-trapping the animals and removing them is generally unsuccessful is because it only creates a vacuum. Mother Nature will always fill that vacuum with some creature. It's that “opportunity knocks” saying, proving itself true. If you trap out the feral cats, more cats or maybe a raccoon will move in. Trap at the wrong time of year, and you may catch only the mom. The nest of babies will likely suffer, die, and attract other animals in the process. Live-trapping is useful, but it needs to be followed up with exclusionary work. Late February is the time to do critter-proof. Do it well, and there should be no need to set traps when baby season comes around.

For answers to your wildlife questions, try calling Wildlife In Need at 262-968-5075. For domestic animal questions, give HAWS a call at 262-542-8851. For animal neglect or abuse concerns or if your group would like a free humane education program, call a Waukesha County Humane Officer at 262-896-8300.

Sincerely,
Jill Posanski
Waukesha County Humane Officer