

# Your Interview

## Dealing with outdoor pests

Comments (19)

Monday, July 7, 2008 | 11:28 AM ET

As we get into summer the warm weather is bringing Canadians outside to enjoy the sunshine, but balmy weather may also lure some unwelcome visitors to your home.

Plagued by raccoons, skunks, bats and other outdoor pests?

Corey Lewis, field operations manager for Humane Wildlife Control took your questions on dealing with pests.

Read his answers below.

[« Previous Chat](#) | [Main](#)

This discussion is now Closed. [View the questions.](#)

### Chat Questions (19)

Nancy Crozier

Toronto

Even on the hottest evenings, we can't keep our sliding patio door open with a screen because raccoons tear at it, open it, and walk right into our house. We don't have A/C and we need that screen door! What can we do to dissuade them?

**Corey Lewis:** Well Nancy, your situation is not as rare as you might think. We actually get dozens of calls a season from frustrated homeowners such as you, who have had screens around their homes ripped open by raccoons and squirrels.

Perhaps more interesting, is the number of raccoons these days that have figured out how to simply open the door rather than destroy it. In any case, the solutions are not simple. Firstly, we must accept the fact raccoons are everywhere in our cities and living with them is something you cannot avoid. In many cases it is food that the raccoons are seeking when tearing screens, rather than shelter. S

ome homeowners have found success by keeping the doors closed when they are cooking, and using their range hoods to exhaust food odours.

Others have tried playing talk radio on low volume, (from a small radio placed near the door), to simulate a human presence. It is also possible that this raccoon lives on your property somewhere (eg. under a shed or deck) and entering your home is a part of patrolling its territory. Having a professional do a proper inspection of the home and property, may prove your visitor is actually a resident!!

Graham

London

We have trouble with squirrels wrecking things in our backyard. They chew or scratch holes in our portable pool liner. How can we dissuade them or keep them out of the yard?



Corey Lewis

**Corey Lewis:** With squirrel populations averaging 15-25 individuals per square kilometer in urban areas, it seems these days, everyone has a squirrel problem.

Being rodents doesn't help much either as the nature of their constantly growing teeth, means they must constantly chew to wear them down. Squirrels do considerable damage inside attics as well, chewing electrical wires, roof trusses, and destroying insulation. Trapping is not a viable solution, because with 2 litters a year, they re-populate back to the neighbourhood's carrying capacity almost immediately.

Often times it is water that is sought by urban wildlife as the rare commodity, and not food. The chewing of the pool liner seems to indicate that. I don't know whether they are chewing from the inside or outside, but the solution is to protect the liner either with an external, heavy gauge, sheet metal skirt, or pool cover. Couple that with an alternative water source somewhere else on the property may help reduce the damage to the pool. Good luck!

Anne Jewlal

We have a family of chipmunks living under our deck. They appear to be resistant to our attempts to get them to leave. They eat our flower and herbal seeds that we have in planters on the deck, as well as chew the deck.

What can we do safely to have them go away and find a new home?  
All suggestions would be appreciated.

Thanks, Anne

**Corey Lewis:** Chipmunks almost always den under a structure such as a deck, concrete patio slab, shed or even under an addition built onto the home without a foundation. They also tend to have very small territories. My best suggestion for you is to have your chipmunks evicted from under the deck and also wildlife proof the perimeter using steel screening.

Chipmunks are notorious for finding ways back under structures once they have been removed. It is always best to hire a professional to provide this service so that the risks of damage to buried utilities, your gardens and the deck itself is minimized.

Full guarantees are offered for eviction services such as this, so please do your homework and choose a reputable company that stands behind their work and is a BBB member in good standing. Due to having small territories, once they have been evicted, they will likely move back into a more suitable habit outside the range of your herbs.

Kim

Alberta

We have problems with muskrats digging holes in the banks of the manmade pond on our rural property. They also eat the bullrushes which have begun to spring up. How can we get rid of them humanely?

**Corey Lewis:** Although Humane Wildlife Control is the largest wildlife control company in Canada, I'm sorry to say we do not have technicians in Alberta. We do however have muskrats in many of the areas we do service throughout Ontario and Quebec.

The most effective, and humane solution for muskrats (short of reconstructing your pond to include a buried steel grid under the topsoil to prevent tunneling), is the use of a predator scent. Try getting your hands on some mink lure from a local hunting store and apply a few drops of that to the muskrats favorite resting locations (eg. exposed rocks or logs along the water's edge). Mink eat muskrats, and it usually works when regularly applied.

Rick

I too have major chipmunk problems but in my case they are getting into my house through a snow basement and under the aluminum siding. As soon as I patch their holes they dig a new entry the same day. How do I discourage them from entering my house (while my wife encourages them with a constant supply of seeds outside)?

**Corey Lewis:** Your wife is not doing you any favours supplying food for the chipmunks, Rick. That supply may be the very reason you have not been able to keep the chipmunks out of the basement.

Chipmunks “cache” food during times of plenty. I would not be surprised if you had bushels of seed now stored somewhere in a basement crawlspace, wall or ceiling cavity. You may also be locking the animals inside when you close the holes, forcing them to chew out. We have specialized techniques for removing live animals from difficult places without traps, poisons, or dangerous fogs.

Basements can always be “wildlife proofed” once the animals are confirmed out, but often it takes considerable effort and time to do it right.

Neil

Driving me batty! bats are living in my attic...what is the best method to get rid of them? I'm quite positive i know how they're getting in. Two questions: 1) how do i get them out to seal off their entrance with out hurting them? 2)If I place a bat house else where on the property would that help?

Thanks, looking forward to your suggestions,  
Neil

**Corey Lewis:** Your question could not have been more perfectly timed. We are right now entering “BAT SEASON”!!! There are many serious health risks associated with bats. Histoplasmosis is a respiratory illness caused by inhaling the spores of a fungus that grows on bat and bird droppings. It produces incurable, life long, flue-like symptoms.

Not to mention the fact that 2-10% of bats can be rabid depending on the population being sampled. There is never a single time to evict bats effectively. Removing them is a process. They feed on a 24 to 48 hour cycle, and so you can never be sure they are all out at any given time. They also overwinter in attics. Simply waiting until midnight, or winter to close the holes will lock bats inside. And believe me when I say a dead bat colony is way more expensive and difficult to remove than a live one.

Bat houses will not draw bats out of your attic. That’s like you moving out of your home into a cardboard box your neighbour has placed at the end of his driveway. Attics are absolutely ideal, and they must be evicted by a qualified professional. We are a leader in effective and permanent bat removal and exclusion, also providing full attic restoration services to handle fecal contamination and re-insulating if needed.

When dealing with bats, you do not want to put yourself and your family at risk. Please consult with a professional.

Rob

A skunk has taken up residence in our semi-rural neighbourhood. It appears to be finding an ample food supply, dining on the squirrels and birds our neighbours’ three cats kill. How can we encourage the skunk to move on before we, or our dog, have an odorous encounter?

Getting our neighbours to keep their cats indoors is probably not a possibility so we won’t be able to cut the skunk’s food supply that way.

The skunk’s burrow is in one neighbour’s property, the cats are on the other side. Our yard is the skunk’s route to dinner.

**Corey Lewis:** Skunk numbers are on the rise according to our annual call volumes. Unfortunately there is little

you can do to keep skunks off your property if they are simply passing through.

Your neighbour on the other hand should be considering evicting the animals from their property and skunk proofing the structure they are living under. Reducing the availability of den sites, and other areas of shelter, will reduce their local numbers and your risks of encountering them.

Shauna Sterparn

I discovered a deceased small weasel (least weasel?) in our backyard this spring. I suspect it ate some mouse bait, one way or another. We seem to have had a lot less mice this year and probably we can thank the little weasel. There are many pets, including our own cat, around. If we get another weasel moving in, is this a good thing to keep the rodent population down or a bad thing for the pets?

**Corey Lewis:** Weasels are very effective predators, and mice are the largest part of their diet. They are not very destructive in most cases however, certainly no where near as destructive as mice. If it were my property, I would welcome a weasel. That being said, it may be a long time before another turns up.

In the meantime, you are still faced with a mouse population that will grow exponentially. We have very specialized techniques for evicting mice from homes that do not involve trapping or poisons.

Please feel free to check out our web site at [humanewildlifecontrol.com](http://humanewildlifecontrol.com) or call to speak with one of our representatives for more information on mice.

Rene

In our neighbourhood we have a lot of rabbits running around...what is the best way to prevent them from eating my flowers and bushes aside from unsightly chicken wire fences. Any suggestions would be appreciated. Thanks!

**Corey Lewis:** For rabbits, most people are forced into unsightly prevention measures such as screen cages and tree wraps. We have had success with low profile, low voltage electric fences around flower beds and full yards. The shock is extremely mild. Similar to what you would get rubbing your socks on carpet and touching someone's arm. This also tends to be an effective solution other wildlife entering gardens as well.

Mike

Ottawa

I have serious problems with woodpeckers pecking hole in my cedar siding. I do not want to kill them, but the holes they make give the squirrels access to the inside and they further damage the inside walls. What to do?..Thanks

**Corey Lewis:** We have encountered this issue before, Mike, however usually it happens in the reverse. Most times it is the squirrels that chew the first hole, then bugs enter (ie. flies and beetles), then the woodpeckers come calling.

If it's spring time that you have the most trouble, it may be because woodpeckers are cavity nesters, and they are investigating an open hole made by a squirrel. In any case, the first step is to get the squirrels out. They are far more destructive. Right now is the second baby season for 2008, and you need to address locating the nest (often in an attic or wall), and remove the babies first.

We often place the babies in a heated baby box on the outside of the home before chasing mom outside. It is important to make sure all roof vents, chimneys, loose flashing, and wall vents are squirrel proofed. Squirrels will be very determined to get back inside once evicted. They chew all normal home construction materials such as wood, plastic, vinyl, shingles, and aluminum. Only welded steel screen, properly fit and secured will work against these determined rodents.

Janet Davis

Toronto

We have a raccoon problem, but it does not involve our house. Raccoons have turned our large garden (which has a small pond) into what one wildlife control expert called a "raccoon urinal". Alas, the smell on hot, humid days is overpowering. We have tried humane trapping (very expensive in a ravine-adjacent neighbourhood with a seemingly endless supply of raccoons) and deterrents such as moth balls (not environmentally safe and poisonous to boot). Nothing has helped. I don't know anyone else with this problem, but it is making us want to stay indoors on beautiful summer evenings. Any suggestions?

**Corey Lewis:**

You're correct in that the smell of raccoon urine and feces can be over-powering.

Again, it is likely the pond is the big draw for them. There are commercially available, raccoon proof covers for ponds. Sounds intense, I know, but they don't look bad when installed properly. They are also a safety feature for families with small children.

The big concern is the dangers presented by the feces itself. Raccoon roundworm is a very serious, and growing public health threat in urban areas, and is found in 80% of all raccoon feces. Please visit our web site and read the information on raccoon roundworm. Feces from wildlife is always best handled by a trained professional as many parasites can be caught by people through inhalation or cross-contamination from gloves, footwear, etc.

Also, areas contaminated by feces should be disinfected and have specific odour control products applied so the smell doesn't return on wet or humid days.

ScottC

Ottawa

We have a neighbourhood groundhog who seems to be living under 2-3 of our decks. We've put up fencing to save our vegetable garden, but he seems to have a feast and destroy all the other flower gardens & plants. Is there any way to dissuade him, short of having him humanely removed?

**Corey Lewis:** Groundhogs are probably one of the more difficult challenges facing wildlife control companies today. Almost all animals that live under structures such as decks or sheds can be evicted and excluded effectively by trenching a foot or so down and installing steel screening. This is not always the case with groundhogs as they can start a tunnel from several feet away and can go deeper than anyone wants to dig with a shovel.

Historically the solution has been to trap and relocate. Effectively moving the problem some place else. Trapping is inhumane however, spreading disease, putting animals under extreme stress, and often separating adults from young. Ministry of Natural Resources studies also show up to 60% of relocated animals die within a short time after being relocated because they get outcompeted in the new area by the established, resident animals.

There are home remedies for protecting plants in gardens such as pepper solutions, but they tend to wash off and become ineffective rather quickly. There are also motion activated sprinklers which target an animal that sets it off. Let us know if you come up with a fool-proof solution. We'd love to hear it.

aj

Toronto

How to avoid birds nesting inside kitchen exhaust vent?

Another question, I am observing many ants under the deck, is there a way to get rid of them? Thank you

**Corey Lewis:** Removing birds from a wall vent. It is one of our most common calls in July and August as tens of thousands of starlings and sparrows move back into our urban areas and start the summer nesting season.

Both species are cavity nesters and wall vents such as dryer, stove and bathroom fan vents make ideal cavities. There are health and safety concerns with this problem such as bird mites and potential for fire, and so extreme caution should be exercised. Often times nesting material is packed tight against the fan unit, pushing past the plastic damper and into the blades. Running the motor with the blades locked up puts high heat and dried grass in close proximity.

Mites also migrate en mass once a nest is disturbed, often coating everything to the point of looking like spilled black pepper. Wear personal protective gear such as a respirator, rubber gloves and disposable coveralls.

Always make sure all nesting material is removed and the entire duct disinfected. Galvanized steel screen cages should be installed over top of the vent hood. Avoid the generic plastic ones off the shelf at hardware stores. They don't work.

Wendy Hansen

HI,

I live in a stone house and once in an unpleasant while a bat is in the house. Clearly not all places can be sealed..my question is what is the best method to get the bat out of the house without causing it harm or another sleepless night. I experience it flying past my nose in the bedroom because it is following air drafts or something. It is not fun..should I open all lights, open door, should I close lights open door..so many suggestions, but what works? I like bats to live, just not doing fly bys over my bed.

**Corey Lewis:** Wendy, please realize that a bat in the living space of your home is not a fluke. It did not come in through an open window or in with the groceries. It is a lost individual that has likely come from a colony in the attic or walls, and found some opening that allowed it into the room.

Do not take a bat in the bedroom lightly because of the risk of rabies. Most public health agencies consider anytime a bat is found in the living space of a home within a 24 hour period of a person sleeping, to be a "positive contact case." This is because you can be bitten while asleep and not even know it.

In all cases, consultation with the local public health authority and your family physician is a must, in case post exposure shots are necessary. In the case of a 3am bat flying over the bed scenario, because of the risk of rabies, I recommend calling a humane wildlife control company with 24hour emergency service to capture the bat and retain it for testing. This may prevent you from undergoing precautionary shots in the event the bat tests negative.

Also, every house can be bat proofed. Some just take more effort. We use a specially produced Wildlife Exclusion Sealant, developed for Bats, birds and mice that is ideal for sealing up homes.

Ben Lalonde

How do you get rid of ducks that constantly sit on a dock. I have tried to keep them away by using a net but with limited success.

**Corey Lewis:** Ben, I have to be honest, I don't think I have ever had this question before. We've done a duck in fireplace once, believe it or not. Long storey. But a duck on a dock tends to simply be a chase it off type solution. I would recommend a motion activated sprinkler installed fairly close to the end of the dock to maximize the pressure they get hit with. A light shower would likely be welcomed if the pressure isn't high enough.

Sara Matte

Raccoons! I live in a country town close to a River. Off to a bad start I know! One night by mistake I left the garbage can on the back deck; needless to say it was not in the can in the morning! I have stopped leaving the garbage out however; the raccoon keeps coming and defecating on the deck. It almost seems as though it's doing it to get back at me for not leaving his supper out! What should I do to stop it from doing its business on my deck?

**Corey Lewis:** There are mild shock electric mats available for keeping raccoons off very specific areas such as air conditioners or small patio areas. They work fairly well as raccoons tend to be creatures of habit, and if they lose their favourite latrine, the next one might be far enough away it doesn't put people at risk. Please read my comments above regarding the significant health risks regarding raccoon feces, raccoon roundworm and feces cleanup.

Also, you may want to invest in a raccoon proof storage unit to house your garbage cans, raccoon proofing your roof and chimney. Its only a matter of time before a more permanent presence is established.

Brett Evans

Muskoka

Please help with my Deer problem my wife plants many flowers and the Deer think its a salad bar!!We have used blood meal ,deer away,egg and water eventually nothing works it simply rains and all bets are off.

**Corey Lewis:** You're in deer country, Brett! You're likely providing them with food sources that taste like candy compared to the wild trees and shrubs they usually feed on. Specific gardens, and plants can be protected with special scent posts containing a battery operated, mild shock device. The theory is the deer approach the garden, catch wind of the scent, move towards it for a nibble, and zap! They get a little shock on the nose. It teaches them that the garden is associated with shocks, and after a few of those they move on to safer feeding areas.

Ricky

toronto

We've had mice in our house the last 3 years. not sure how to rid them... we keep setting traps, and killing a few here and there, but others keep coming back. any suggestions on who to hire or what to do?

**Corey Lewis:** Traps and poisons can never keep up with the rate of breeding. And poisons are a brutal way to kill an animal. They also put family pets and children at risk. Most mice also live in the structure of the building, but source their food outside, coming and going as needed. That's why most mouse problems escalate so quick without the homeowner realizing, because they are not necessarily coming into the kitchen to eat.

The solution to a mouse problem is in identifying the points of entry from the outside, and sealing them up with an exclusion material that is mouse proof. Make sure you get the mice out first, as mice that die inside the walls and ceilings of a finished home are not only very smelly, but almost impossible to locate without major hole cutting and costly repair bills.

Electronic repellents don't tend to work as they generate high frequency sounds which are a short wavelength, and don't penetrate objects such as floors and walls very well.

Beth

Orangeville

A mother skunk set up home under our laundry room. I assume she was having little skunks. We have responded by playing a radio all day over where the burrow is (we are tracking where she stays by the smell and has been moving about under the floor). After about a month of this, there is no longer a skunk smell coming

from under the floor. Am I safe to assume the skunks have flown the coop and can I now block up the hole they dug to get in?

Thanks!

**Corey Lewis:** Skunks don't tend to abandon den sites for long. Never seal up a hole without confirming there is no activity any longer. If you think a live skunk smells, try a dead one, or a litter of dead ones.

We have special methods to confirm a den is empty before sealing up holes such as physical inspections, monitored testing, and sometimes using remote cameras. Proper trenching and screening is a must with skunks as they will dig back in over and over if it isn't done properly. They are also gregarious in winter, often grouping up with 10 or more skunks in one den.

We are in skunk baby season now, and caution should be observed when evicting at this time to avoid abandonment of the young.