

Non-chemical Control of Raccoons

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Raccoons can be large animals weighing as much as 50 pounds, although most are between 10 and 30 pounds. They are normally found around water but raccoons can travel quite far from naturally occurring water sources. Raccoons are omnivorous. Their diet consists of fruits, berries, nuts, corn, other grains, crayfish, clams, fish, frogs, snails, insects, eggs, mice, rabbits and the eggs and young of ground - nesting birds. Raccoons breed mainly in February and March. After a gestation period of 63 days, three to five young are born.

Raccoons leave distinctive, five-toed tracks. The damage they inflict varies from killing poultry and scattering garbage to devouring sweet corn and preying on ground - nesting birds and waterfowl.

Habitat Modification

Reducing raccoon problems by modifying or making changes to the habitat is usually only possible by eliminating food or shelter sources in areas around homesteads.

Exclusion

Exclusion is usually the best method of coping with raccoons. Electric fencing at the top of a poultry - yard fence will prevent them from climbing, but gates and fencing must be tight to the ground. Raccoons are capable of digging but usually try to gain access in other ways. Electric wire can also be effective in stopping coon damage to melon and sweet corn patches. A single or double hot wire six to 10 inches above the ground works best. Use wire or clamps to keep raccoons out of garbage cans that do not have tight - fitting lids. Place aluminum flashing or galvanized sheet metal around trees or poles to prevent raccoons from climbing.

Repellents and Frightening Devices

Frightening devices for raccoons have not proven to be effective in the long term. Lights, radios, dogs, pie pans and plastic windmills are only effective temporarily. There are no repellents, toxicants or fumigants currently registered for the control of raccoons.

Trapping

Trapping is often the most logical way to stop raccoon damage. They are relatively easy to trap, but because they are extremely strong and persistent, the trap must be sturdy.

Be sure to check state and local regulations before using traps to catch raccoons.

A cage trap is often the most logical trap to use around homesteads. These traps need to be at least 10 by 12 by 32 inches and well - constructed with heavy materials. Bait the trap with a fish - based, canned cat food. Place a thumbnail - sized piece at the entrance, another on the treadle and a larger amount in a paper cup broken off to one inch. Place the cup in the center of the trap's back section. If the raccoon is to be released, take it at least 20 miles from the trap site.

Conibear®, or body-gripping traps, are very effective as long as there is no risk of capturing a pet or some other animal you don't intend to trap. Place these kill - type traps in trees in a way that makes the raccoon go through the trap to get to the bait. Remember the risks to non - target animals when using body - gripping traps. Be sure to check regulations before using any type of traps.

Foothold traps are an effective way to catch raccoons. Again, be sure you will not trap any animal you do not wish to harm. A number 1 or 1 ½ size trap works for raccoons. Make a set by placing bait in a small hole and concealing the trap under a light covering of soil in front of the hole. Encapsulated foot traps (also known as dog - proof traps) are designed to catch only raccoons and greatly reduce the chance of catching non-target animals. They use a trigger mechanism that requires the raccoon to reach into a steel cylinder and grasp the bait. When the raccoon attempts to pull the bait out the trap is triggered and the paw of the raccoon is entrapped.

When using any foot traps, always locate them at least 3 feet away from sensitive items the raccoons will damage if they can reach them.

Acknowledgments

Much of the information presented here was adapted from S.E. Hygnstrom (1994) in *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply discrimination or endorsement by the Montana State University Extension Service.