



Discouraging Wildlife

Wildlife watching can be fun and fascinating in natural settings, but when wildlife venture into our gardens, orchards, landscapes, and homes, it can cause conflict. The most common nuisance wildlife species that Cooperative Extension gets calls on are: javelina, gophers, rock squirrels, woodrats (packrats), rabbits, raccoons, skunks, beaver, deer, and elk. None of these animals are really considered pests when they are in a wildland (non-agricultural/non-residential) setting. However, they can become reliant on people for food, water, and/or shelter. Common wildlife attractants are pet food, wild bird feeders, water features, open crawlspaces, and food crops. Carnivorous wildlife (herons, raptors, coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions) are also attracted to pets, fish, and livestock. The easiest way to minimize wildlife conflicts is by removing attractants and limiting access.

Before discouraging (or controlling) any nuisance pest, be it insect, mammal, or bird, you must correctly identify it. A case of mistaken identity can lead to a lot of wasted resources and effort. Many nuisance wildlife species are nocturnal. Therefore, the identification of these animals must be based on observations of tracks, droppings, trails, burrows, tooth marks, and other characteristic types of damage.

After identification, you should also be aware of the legal status of the species in question. Most mammals and bird species and certain reptiles, amphibians and fishes are protected by state and/or federal laws. However, some common pest species are not protected and can be controlled if they are causing damage. In Arizona, these species include: woodrats, Norway rats, house mice, ground (rock) squirrels, pocket gophers, rock doves (Pigeons), starlings, and English sparrows.

Prevention is the most reliable, long-term solution to wildlife conflict. Prevention options are related to individual species habitat requirements and behavior. Prevention measures include: habitat modification, exclusion, frightening, and repellents. Habitat modification and exclusion are very reliable prevention methods. Something as simple as feeding pets indoors rather than outside or building a fence often remedies the situation. Frightening and repellents may also be employed, but animals sometimes habituate to these practices. Exclusion (fencing, covering, hardware cloth, sheet metal, etc.) often works best and causes the least disruption to non-target species.

Control measures include: trapping (lethal or live), toxicants, fumigants, shooting, and biological control. Depredation permits for state regulated species may be obtained from the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). Lethal control methods are distasteful to many people, including some gardeners. For this reason, live trapping is often used to "save" the offending animal. It can be effective. However, in many cases the animal is released too close to the trapping site and returns. Conversely, wildlife released in occupied territory of the same species will compete for resources and territory in unfamiliar surroundings. When toxicants and/or other lethal means are employed, be mindful that non-target organisms (dogs, cats, birds, etc.) can be inadvertently affected. If there is any risk of secondary poisoning, do not use toxicants. Likewise, lethal traps should be placed in areas only accessible to pest species.



Havahart live trap

The following list of specific pests and viable strategies may help minimize damage after attractants are removed and habitat is modified.

Pocket Gophers: trapping, exclusion (hardware cloth or concrete to a 3 foot depth), fumigants, toxicants, repellents, and resistant plants.

Rock Squirrels: trapping, fumigants, toxicants, eliminate habitat (rock and brush piles), exclusion, flooding.

Woodrats: exclusion (buildings), trapping, anticoagulants, obliterate dens.

Skunks: exclusion, live trap, repellents (ammonia/moth balls).

Raccoons: exclusion, live trap.

Javelina: sturdy fencing (minimum 2 ½ - 3 feet tall and sturdy), electric fence.

Cottontail Rabbits: exclusion (fence 2 feet above ground and 1 foot below), repellents.

Deer and Elk: exclusion (sturdy 8 to 10 foot fences), repellents and frightening are marginally effective.

Beaver: exclusion (low electric or wire fences), hardware cloth barriers around trees.

For many situations, hiring a Wildlife Damage Control Professional may be the best solution.

Additional Resource:

Kansas State Extension
[Wildlife Management](#)

Yavapai Cooperative Extension
[Managing Pocket Gophers](#)
[Links to several publications on wildlife](#)

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