

UNDERSTANDING WILDLIFE Safe and Effective Wildlife Protection

By Denys Hemen

Urban and suburban parts of Los Angeles allow for both positive and negative interactions with local wildlife. With a little work and understanding, humans and wild animals can coexist. In this article, we explore methods for sharing space with wildlife we may encounter.

Northern Raccoons and **Virginia Opossums** are active at night. To help keep them out of your yard, remove their reasons for being there. Do not leave any fallen fruit on the ground and never leave cat or dog food outside at night. Close up all entryways into your home both underneath, such as basement windows, and on your roof. These are some easy ways to deter nocturnal wildlife from coming around.



A common misunderstanding about Virginia Opossums is that they are vicious. These creatures are not aggressive and do not want anything to do with you. Virginia Opossums will sleep in sheds and areas like wood piles. To keep them out, make sure all entry ways in sheds are sealed and do not leave piles of “things” in your yard for them to take shelter under. Raccoons are curious and will test their limits. By nature, they want nothing to do with us but when fed by humans, they can get a little close for comfort. Usually, a quick squirt with a water hose will deter them from exploring the area.

Coyotes are becoming a more common sight in suburban and urban areas. As our development encroaches into their habitat and climate change forces them to seek water and other resources that are becoming harder to find in wild habitats, they will make their way into residential areas. To aid coexistence, do not allow small dogs to be left unattended in open yards,

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especially during the early morning and evening hours. When walking small dogs, avoid using extra-long retractable leashes. Keep your pet close to you. Cats, a common target of coyotes, should never be outside, period. Outdoor cats are harmful for the environment and are decimating native bird populations. If a coyote visits your yard and you feel uncomfortable, slowly walk away from them. A noise maker, such as an aluminum can with a few pennies inside of it, can be tossed toward a coyote and they will run away. As mentioned above, be sure not to leave pet food and water out at night and clean up fallen fruit from trees.

Rattlesnakes can be seen in suburban areas that are in some of the more undeveloped areas of Los Angeles. Most bites occur on the hands of people who try to pick up or harass one of these snakes. They are generally very lazy and will warn you when you get close. Familiarize yourself with the buzzing sound their rattles make by watching a video online. If you ever hear the sound, stop, and

look around for the rattlesnake and slowly back away. As long as they are not being harassed, rattlesnakes want to leave us alone and save their valuable venom for prey they can eat. If you live in an area where rattlesnakes are common, keep them out of your yard by clearing out any piles of belongings that they might be tempted to take shelter under. Always watch where you are stepping and when lifting objects try not to put your hand under to lift. Rattlesnakes are beneficial to our ecosystem mostly because they are a natural form of rodent control!

By taking just a few simple steps we can enjoy nature right outside our backdoor and peacefully coexist with our wildlife neighbors.



Denys Hemen, has been Hospital Manager for the California Wildlife Center for more than a decade, helping save injured and orphaned wildlife. The CWC is dedicated to the protection of native wildlife through rehabilitation, education, and conservation. <https://cawildlife.org/>

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