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Nuisance Wildlife: Preventing and Dealing with Encounters

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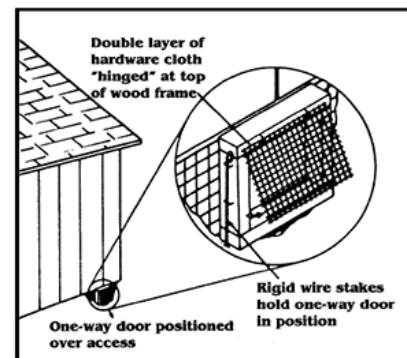
More than 75 percent of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. While the growth of cities and subdivisions displaces some wildlife, many species continue to live in the habitat available in parks, undeveloped parcels of land and vacant lots, along stream and river corridors and in our backyards. Their presence can provide recreational and educational viewing opportunities. For many people, especially children, viewing wildlife in the backyard is exciting. People and wildlife can peacefully coexist in most situations. However, there may be times when conflicts arise.

Most of the common problems associated with urban wildlife (for example, squirrels in the attic, skunks under the deck, or raccoons rooting through the garbage) can be avoided by implementing a few simple measures. The following two-part discussion includes

- How to reduce the likelihood of wildlife becoming a nuisance, and
- How to control specific wildlife species after they become a nuisance.

Prevention

- Don't feed wildlife. If you choose to feed songbirds, place the feeder where it is inaccessible to other wildlife species.
- Use a feeder with a gravity-operated treadle to discourage squirrels, and don't let spilled food accumulate.
- Trim tree branches that extend over your roof or install a three-foot-wide band of sheet metal (six feet above the ground) around the trunks of trees which overhang your house. This will reduce the access raccoons have to your roof.
- Cover window wells with grates, bubbles or hardware cloth.
- Keep pet food inside.
- Seal up holes around and under home foundations.
- Bury 1/4-inch mesh hardware cloth one to two feet deep in places where animals might gain access through digging.
- Store garbage in metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep the containers in the garage or shed and put trash out only when it is scheduled for pick up.
- Fence gardens and cover fruit trees and berry bushes with netting. Screen fireplace chimneys and furnaces (from February to September) as well as attic and dryer vents. Keep dampers

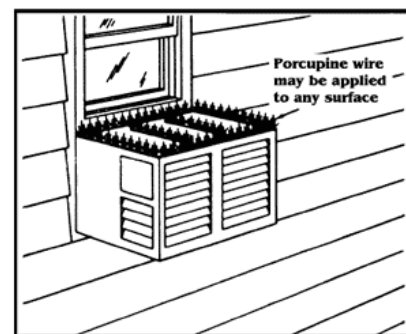


One-Way Door

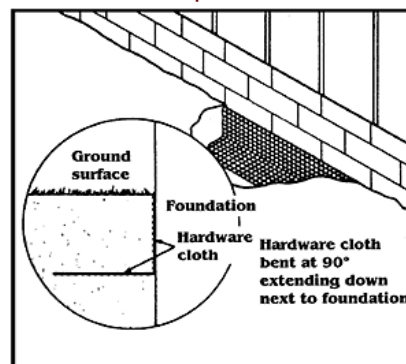


closed when not in use (consult a knowledgeable source to prevent fire or safety hazards).

- Decks built less than two feet off the ground should have 1/4-inch mesh hardware cloth nailed from the top of the outside joists to the bottom of a 10-inch trench, leaving about six to eight inches of extra hardware cloth at the bottom to form an L-shape. Wooden lattice can be added for aesthetics.
- Seal all holes and cracks in your foundation, siding or stucco that are larger than 3/8 inch wide to keep rats, mice, bats, and snakes out. Common entry points include chimneys; gaps around window air conditioners, water pipes or electric outlets; openings in interior walls that lead to the attic or ceiling; loose or shrunken siding boards; and loose vent covers.
- Repair broken, weak or rotted areas on the roof, soffit and fascia of your house.
- Mark large windows with strips of white tape or raptor (hawk) silhouettes to avert birds from flying into the window.



Porcupine Wire



Foundation Skirt

Control

Bats

Most bats live near human habitations without ever making their presence known. Bats are the only major predator of night-flying insects and eat a variety of insects, as well. Bats use existing openings (cracks as small as 3/8 inches) to enter buildings or to roost in attics. To exclude the bats wait until they leave for the night to feed, then seal the entrance. It is wise to do this in the fall after the young have learned to fly.

Occasionally a bat may get in your house. If one does, there is no reason to panic! Close interior doors, confine it to one room if possible, and open a window or exterior door. The bat will leave as soon as it locates the exit. If the bat lands on a curtain or piece of furniture, cover it with a jar or a towel, or pick it up with a leather glove, and release it outdoors. Determine how the bat got into the house and seal the opening(s).

Black Bears

Black bears are large animals and can cause significant damage while in search of an easy meal. If your yard is being visited by a black bear there are several things that must be done to ensure that the animal doesn't become a "problem bear". A "problem bear" can be defined as an animal that has lost its natural fear of humans and habitually causes property damage while in search of food. In this instance all potential food attractants must be removed from the area. This includes:

- **Bird feeders and other wildlife feed**-remove feeders, including hummingbird and suet feeders.
- **Trash receptacles**-store your garbage either in a garage or a secure container.
- **Pet foods**-keep pet foods inside, especially at night.
- **Grease from grills**-clean out grease traps after each use; store grill in garage or shed.
- **Secure beehives**-place electric fencing around beehives.
- **Crops**-pick fruit from berry bushes as soon as possible; scare bears out of agriculture fields as soon as damage occurs; contact your [County Wildlife Officer](#).



For more information, visit the [Black Bears in Ohio](#) webpage.

Roosting Birds

Sparrows, starlings, and pigeons are the most troublesome of the birds commonly found in the urban environment. When these birds congregate in large numbers their droppings can create a foul-smelling, unsightly mess.

Netting can effectively be used to exclude birds from virtually any kind of structure and from roosting or nesting in trees. The net will not entangle birds. Netting may be draped across the front of buildings; fasten it tightly from above windows to below the ledge to discourage perching.



Most birds prefer to perch on flat surfaces. Surfaces with an angle of 60 degrees or greater cause birds to slide off when they try to land. Wood or metal sheathing cut at an angle can also be added to the problem area. Another deterrent is to install porcupine wire on ledges and rails where birds roost. Thinning tree branches will remove perch sites and reduce a source of wind protection, which may force the birds to move to another site. Combinations of noise (AM/FM radio, wind chimes, firecrackers, banging pots and pans) and visual stimuli (colored flags, reflective tape, revolving lights, balloons, replicas of hawks and owls) used persistently can evict birds. Control measures should be initiated as soon as the problem is identified.

Raccoons

Raccoons are well adapted to urban living. Raccoon damage typically involves raiding gardens, upsetting trash cans and taking up residence in chimneys, attics or other unwanted areas. Control is not difficult, but requires persistence.

Garden fruits and vegetables can be very appealing and accessible to raccoons. For smaller garden plots, a single strand of electric fence can be strung eight inches above the ground.

An inexpensive radio which is turned on, placed under a garbage can and left in the garden overnight, will also often discourage raccoons from approaching.

The easiest solution for garbage can raids is to store the cans inside the garage or a shed overnight. Raccoons may also be repelled by coating the outside of the can with a weak solution of cayenne pepper in water or by placing a small dish of ammonia in the bottom of an empty can.

Uncapped chimneys are appealing nest den sites to raccoons. When this occurs they may be evicted by noise, combined with bright lights or a pan of ammonia sealed in the fireplace. Once the raccoon vacates the chimney, install a chimney cap. Identify and seal other attic entries after evicting the raccoon. Overhanging tree limbs provide easy access to your roof. Inspect your house and trim tree limbs where needed.

Occasionally raccoons will enter a house through a pet door. Since they can cause considerable damage if panicked, it is advisable to quietly open windows and doors through which the animal may exit and close doors that provide access to other parts of the house, before leaving the room. Wait quietly for the animal to escape.

Raccoons can transmit rabies, canine distemper, and parvovirus to domestic animals and humans. You should avoid any raccoon which is active during daylight hours, has lost its fear of humans, or appears uncoordinated, confused or listless. If you encounter such an animal, report these observations to the District Office; if exposed to a potentially sick animal, contact your local Health Department and/or your personal physician.

Nuisance or sick raccoons may be trapped without a permit, but it is illegal to live trap and relocate them to a new area. In order to prevent the possible spread of raccoon diseases in Ohio, all live trapped raccoons must be released again on the homeowner's property or humanely euthanized. Consult your [district wildlife office](#) for further information.



Skunks and Opossums

Skunks and opossums seldom cause damage to property other than raiding garbage or eating pet food. They sometimes reside under buildings or in rock and wood piles. Discourage visits by taking appropriate precautions.

- In confined spaces skunks or opossums may be driven away by placing an ammonia-soaked towel in the den.
- Install a one-way door until you are sure the animal(s) have left, then permanently seal the entrance.
- An animal that becomes trapped in a window well will climb out if you place a rough board in the well that extends to the top.
- If an animal gets into the house, open a door and calmly allow it to exit.
- Don't chase or excite a skunk!



Nuisance or sick skunks and opossums may be trapped without a permit, but as with raccoons they may not be relocated. Consult your [wildlife district office](#) for further information.

Snakes

There are [32 species and subspecies of snakes](#) in Ohio. Most snakes are beneficial in helping to control destructive insects and rodents. Only three species of snakes in Ohio (the copperhead, and the massasauga and timber rattlesnakes) are [venomous](#). None of these snakes are common.



Problems with snakes range from occasional encounters with a single snake to infestations of large numbers of snakes in basements and out-building foundations. Snakes are a valuable part of the ecosystem, including Ohio's 3 venomous species. Individual snakes should be valued for their rodent- and insect-eating habits. A snake which takes up residence where it cannot be tolerated should be captured and released at least a mile away from the dwelling.

You can make an area less attractive to snakes by :

- controlling insect and rodent populations
- removing piles of junk, rocks, brush and boards
- and keeping grass mowed and landscapes clean.

To remove a snake already in a building, you must first find it. If a snake is difficult to find in the open, place a damp cloth or burlap bag covered with a board or shingle on the basement floor. Use a 1/2 to 1 inch spacer to elevate the board so the snake can easily get under it. The combination of dampness and shelter is attractive to snakes, making them easier to capture.

Snakes can be picked up with a hook or hoe, or by making a noose with a loose slipknot in a strong piece of string and attaching it to a short, strong stick. Lower the snake into a strong paper or cloth bag with no holes. If you use the string, clip the noose with a pair of scissors before dropping the snake in the bag. Transport the snake as soon as possible to a woodlot or undeveloped area away from other houses.

Another effective way to capture snakes inside a home is to use a glueboard. These can be purchased in a variety of places such as agriculture supply and hardware stores. Most small snakes can be captured using a single glueboard placed against a wall but away from pipes or other objects that a snake could use for leverage to escape.

For larger snakes (four to five feet long) attach several glueboards side-by-side to a piece of plywood. Release snakes by pouring vegetable oil or common cooking oil over the snake where it is adhered to the glueboard. Glueboards should only be used indoors or under structures where children, pets and other wildlife cannot reach them.

Squirrels

Squirrels are never found far from the shelter provided by trees. They are opportunistic foragers feeding on acorns, nuts, fruits, berries, corn, fungi, flower bulbs, and bird seed. They readily adapt to suburban and urban areas.

Chasing a frantic squirrel inside your house can result in additional damage. If a squirrel is trapped, open a door or window, block off the room it is in and quietly wait for the squirrel to exit. Once the squirrel is gone, identify where the squirrel entered and seal the access. If the squirrel is in the fireplace, close the damper, block off the room and open an exterior door or window to provide an escape route for the squirrel.

Squirrels trapped inside the chimney flue can be freed by closing the damper and lowering a 1/2-inch diameter rope into the chimney from the roof. The rope must be long enough to reach down to the damper. Anchor the upper end and wait for the squirrel to climb out, then cover the chimney. Before evicting a resident squirrel from the attic determine if young are in the nest and where the female's entrance is located. If there are no young, scare the squirrel out by banging on the rafters inside the attic or wait until the squirrel leaves for the day.

Seal the entrance with 1/4- inch hardware cloth or with sheet metal. Extend the seal at least six inches beyond the hole. If young are present, locate the entrance and install a one-way door until all have left the nest, then proceed as previously described.



Woodpeckers

There are seven species of woodpeckers in Ohio. The majority of woodpeckers do most of their pecking on dead or dying trees. Woodpeckers peck for several reasons: to announce their territory, to feed on insects and to excavate nest cavities. In suburban areas woodpeckers may use houses and drain spouts. No one really knows why, but natural wood siding, a house's large size and better sound production may make houses seem like super trees to the birds. The key to control is to take action as soon as the woodpecker shows signs of becoming a pest.

A troublesome woodpecker may be discouraged by employing one or a combination of techniques:

- Open a nearby window and shout or bang pans whenever the woodpecker is heard
- Hang strips of foil, streamers, cloth, toy snakes, owl decoys or cut-out hawk silhouettes near the problem area to frighten the bird
- Spray a water hose near the bird to frighten it
- Eliminate any ledges or cracks the woodpecker may be using when pecking

- Cover the damaged area with screen, hardware cloth or sheet metal until the bird has been discouraged.

Repair any damage caused by the woodpecker promptly. If insects in the siding seem to be the cause, caulk all the tunnels in the siding. Insecticides and toxic wood preservatives seem to repel woodpeckers as well as providing wood care benefits.

Woodpeckers are protected by federal and state laws. They may only be captured or killed with a special permit issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Animal Damage Control. Call the Division of Wildlife for phone numbers.

Trapping

For those who choose to, trapping can be an effective method of dealing with a troublesome wildlife "guest." The most commonly used device is a cage-like, live-trap which captures the animal physically unharmed. Live traps can be built at home or purchased from a commercial source. Traps should be checked twice a day (morning and evening) to replenish bait or to humanely deal with the captured animal.

Canada Geese

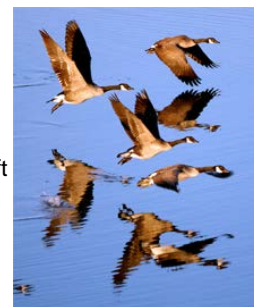


[Submit a Goose Damage Report Online](#)

GOOSE DAMAGE PERMITS are ONLY available MARCH 11 - AUGUST 31

Canada geese are probably the most adaptable and tolerant of all native waterfowl. If left undisturbed, they will readily establish nesting territories on any suitable pond, be it located on a farm, backyard, golf course, apartment or condominium complex, or city park.

Most people will welcome and start feeding the first pair of geese on their pond, but these geese will soon wear out their welcome. In just a few years, a pair of geese can easily become 50 to 100 birds. The feces will foul the areas around the pond and surrounding yards and also damage the lawn, pond, and other vegetation. Geese that are fed will lose their fear of humans and attack adults, children, and pets during the nesting season (March through June). **DO NOT FEED GEESE.** Feeding bread, corn, potato chips, popcorn, and other human food items harms the geese and sets the scene for goose attacks on people



Canada geese are protected under both the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Ohio state law. This protection extends to the geese, goslings, nests, and eggs. Non-lethal scare and hazing tactics, which do not harm the geese, are allowed. These tactics include: pyrotechnics, dogs, barriers, a grid on the pond, laser pointers (at night), distress calls, or grape-flavored repellants such as Flight Control.

If non-lethal tactics have been used in the past, without success, the Division of Wildlife may issue a lethal permit to allow the landowner to destroy nests, conduct a goose roundup, or shoot geese. These permits can only be used **March 11 through August 31**. Hunting in the fall, outside city limits, is also a good method to reduce the goose population, feed people, and further scare the geese away.

The Division of Wildlife has developed a series of handouts that deal with the specifics of the human-geese conflict that can be downloaded in pdf format below.

[Human - Goose Conflict Overview](#)

[Hunting](#)

[Goose Attacks](#)

[Don't Feed the Geese](#)

[Visual Deterrents](#)

[Physical Barriers](#)

[Mechanical Scare Devices \(Hazing\)](#)

[Habitat Modification](#)

[Pyrotechnics](#)

[Biological Controls](#)

[Lasers](#)

[Chemical Repellents](#)

[Harassment Techniques Timeline](#)

[General/Residential](#)

[Agricultural/Rural](#)

[Materials and Supplies](#)

The complete series of [Goose Conflict Sheets & Materials and Supplies](#)

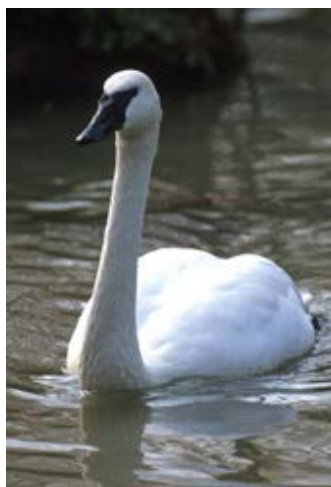
Mute Swans

General Information & Issues

Mute swans are commonly seen on large public lakes and are wide spread throughout Ohio. They are considered a non-native invasive species in the United States, and are becoming a nuisance here in Ohio. There are three species of swans that can be found in Ohio: The native trumpeter swan, tundra swan (or whistling swan which only migrates through Ohio), and the mute swan. Mute swans will outcompete with the threatened trumpeter swan on Lake Erie marshes and other locations for nesting habitat.



Mute Swan



Trumpeter Swan

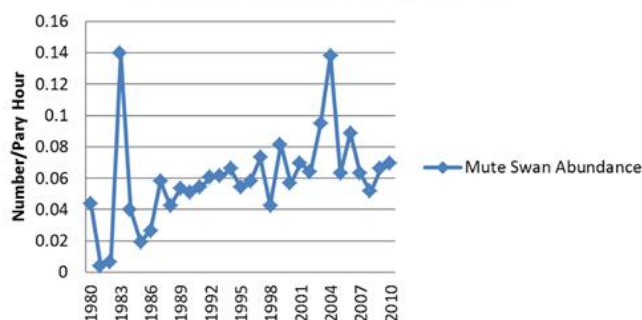


Tundra Swan (note- yellow tear drop by eye)

During the breeding and nesting season, which generally runs March through May, adult mute swans become highly territorial and will fight to push native birds out of their nesting area. Mute swans have been known to attack humans and pets during this time as well. This aggressive behavior also occurs after they young, cygnets, hatch out. On public lakes, people who use jet-skis and kayaks tend to get flogged by swans if they get too close to their nest or young. The adult male will fly after what they see as a predator to chase it away and use their wings to attack. They have been known to drown people in rare occasions.

An adult male swan can weigh up to twenty-six pounds and stand as tall as five feet. Mute swans can consume up to eight pounds of submerged aquatic vegetation in one day. They uproot the whole plant usually leaving nothing behind. This takes away natural habitat from fish and leaves little food source for native waterfowl. The removal of aquatic vegetation can also cause water quality issues and erosion problems.

of mute swans counted per observation hour on
Christmas bird counts in Ohio, 1980-2010



Control Options

The Division of Wildlife controls mute swans on public lands by utilizing egg adding to cut back on production and by physical removal of adult birds. Occasionally, complaints are received from homeowners who surround public lakes when mute swans are being aggressive. Removal of the bird is the action taken when human safety is a factor.

Contrary to what most people believe, mute swans will nest next to Canada geese. Homeowner associations or golf courses will purchase swans for goose control. Ultimately the swans will eventually become a problem for the homeowners around the ponds because of aggression issues, and removal is warranted. We encourage private landowners who chose to have mute swans to keep them controlled. The ways to control them is to only purchase one swan or two of the same sex, and keep their wings clipped or pinioned. This will keep the swan on the owner's property. Landowners can also addle the eggs so cygnets do not hatch out. If the young are going to be allowed to hatch out, their wings need to be clipped or pinioned as well so they cannot leave the property. Division staff will assist private landowners who ask for removal of mutes by giving technical assistance or removing the swans depending on site-specific circumstances.

The Ohio Division of Wildlife has come up with an action plan to deal with nuisance mute swan issues. Click [here](#) for more information on the Ohio Division of Wildlife's Mute Swan Action Plan.

Groundhogs

Issues

Groundhogs, also known as woodchucks, usually are viewed as a nuisance animal for homeowners and farmers. The major problems that they cause are the large holes they dig and the damage that occurs from this animal. Their holes can be 8-12 inches in size. This animal creates two, sometimes three holes, with a large tunnel system that runs from one hole to the next. They usually will have a large mound of dirt in front of the hole called a porch. Groundhogs use this to stand high to get a good view of their surroundings before making their move to venture around. Farmers get crop damage to corn, soybeans, and other crops planted in fields. Groundhog dens are a major concern for



farmers because of the large tunnel system they build under the ground. Farmers have been known to sink tractor tires in the ground because of the big hole that lies below the surface of the field. Most home owners deal with groundhogs denning under their porch or shed, and damaging their gardens. A den that is built next to a building or house can cause structural damage as their burrows can weaken foundation. Contrary to what most

people believe, groundhogs will climb trees. Tree nurseries can face problems with them gnawing on their ornamental or fruit bearing trees. Other wildlife such as fox or skunks will take over groundhog holes when left vacant.

Control Options

If you are dealing with a nuisance groundhog on your property there are a few things you can try to prevent damage. Placing fencing around the garden or underneath your porch is a way to keep them out. However, groundhogs are good climbers and diggers. Fences should be at least 3 feet tall and made of heavy, thick wire such as hardware cloth. Burying the lower portion of the fence into the ground at least a foot should help to prevent them from digging underground. At tree nurseries, placing metal flashing or tree guards around the trees at least 3 feet high will prevent wildlife from stripping the bark and destroying the trees. Once a groundhog is present and living on your property, they are hard to get to move along. The best way to get rid of them is to physically remove them. Nuisance groundhogs can be live trapped and relocated with permission of the landowner. If you choose not to relocate the groundhog, they can either be released on site where the animal was originally trapped or you may humanly kill it. Refer to the American Veterinary Medical Association for guidelines on euthanasia. Landowners who chose to set traps themselves to catch groundhogs should remember that they are responsible for the animal in the trap. Each trap must be labeled with your name and address, checked every 24 hours, and animals removed within 24 hours of being trapped. This is especially important to note when you are trapping within city limits. If you are trapping within city limits, you should always check with their police department to determine if there are any ordinances governing trapping in your community. If you do not want to remove the animal yourself, the Division of Wildlife licenses nuisance trappers that can be contracted with to remove the problem groundhog for a fee. Please click [here](#) for more information on nuisance wild animal trapping regulations. There is an open hunting on groundhogs meaning they may be hunted anytime of the year. You can refer to the Hunting and Trapping Regulations for additional information.



River Otters

General Information

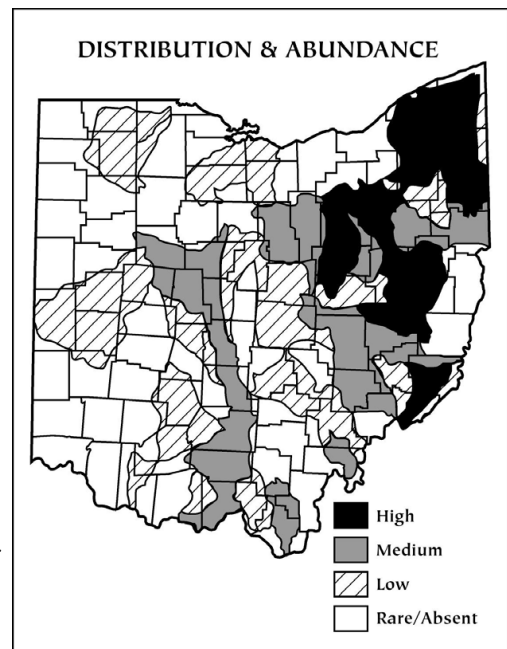
River otters were historically in Ohio, but were extirpated by the early 1900's. The Ohio Division of Wildlife started a seven year reintroduction program for river otters in 1986. There were 123 otters released on the eastern side of the state. Today, the otter population is estimated to be over 6,500. As the population increases more problems are likely to occur with this species.

Pond Damage

Otters have been known to cause damage in private ponds and fish hatcheries. Aquaculture operations and koi ponds are sometimes a target for river otters as the food sources are plentiful. If you notice uneaten fish heads with the skeleton attached along with scat piles, you more than likely are dealing with a river otter in your pond. Their scat piles will consist of scales, exoskeletons and sometimes body parts of fish. River otters will not live in a pond, but rather in a creek or river that is located close to a pond. Often they will travel to find a food source stumbling across a pond. They will repeatedly use the same spot along a creek or river bank to urinate and defecate. These locations are called latrine sites and help you identify if an otter is denning close to your property. Otters are capable of consuming 2-3 pounds of fish per day. When observing damage to a pond, keep in mind that blue herons are also a culprit of killing stocked fish. Herons will leave behind uneaten carcasses with large puncture holes. Mistakenly, river otters get blamed for the damaged because they were spotted in the vicinity.

Control Options

Fencing is a way to keep otters out of ponds by using 3 inch wire mesh at around 3-4 feet tall. By burying the fencing into the ground at 6 inches, this will prevent the otter from pushing underneath the fence. Providing structure such as Christmas trees or cinder blocks for fish will give them safe places to hide from predators such as otters. There is a trapping season on river otters which runs from the end of December through the end of February in specific counties throughout Ohio. You can refer to the Hunting and Trapping Regulations for additional information. Outside of the trapping season if issues are occurring, river otters can be live trapped and relocated with permission of the landowner where the otter will be released.



You may contact your local district office or county wildlife officer for further assistance if lethal control is needed because of certain conditions.

Additional Assistance

Contact your [district wildlife office](#) for a listing of nuisance wildlife trappers in your area or for additional information on wildlife control. You can also check in the yellow pages under pest control to find private companies who may help.