



Dealing with Wildlife Problems: An Ecosystem Approach



Learn more about the wildlife species that is causing problems to discover potential solutions

The ecosystem approach to dealing with wildlife conflicts is a comprehensive way of understanding a wildlife species and its habitat, and then identifying the most effective solution to your particular problem. This approach will help you successfully balance the needs of people and wildlife, and enjoy the beauty and diversity of your habitat management efforts.

How do I deal with wildlife problems?

If you are experiencing problems with a particular wildlife species around your home or grounds, it's likely that your first question is: What can I do to solve it? Before you jump to a quick-fix solution, it's worth asking a few additional questions that will help you take the most effective action.

The ecosystem approach to dealing with wildlife problems asks not just "what is the problem?" but "why is it occurring?" What are the conditions and natural life supports that are sustaining the wildlife species? How might current management practices or landscape conditions actually be contributing to the problem?

An Approach That Works

The ecosystem approach to dealing with problems works with wildlife species great and small. It will help you effectively deal with rodents, birds, deer, mosquitoes, houseflies, grubs or other problem species you encounter. When you take the time to ask the right questions, you'll find the right solutions that really work.

What is the cause?

No wildlife species exists in a vacuum. Every species is connected to a life support system made up of food, cover, and water sources, and exists within a complex food web that includes natural enemies and predators.

When you find out more about the habitat and life habits of your "problem" wildlife species, you'll better understand why the species is causing you trouble. Better still, you'll be able to identify a variety of control options, such as altering the food, cover, or water sources that sustain the species or increasing natural predators and competitors. You also may discover underlying conditions that are at the root of the problem and find ways to correct them. In addition, keep in mind that human values, needs, and perceptions provide a context for all wildlife conflicts. Indeed, there would be no wildlife problems without people. As you try to solve wildlife problems, evaluate your own needs and goals, and define your tolerance for living with various species.

A Step-by-Step Approach

1. Understand the species and its habitat
2. Evaluate and define the problem specifically
3. Survey your property
4. Review solutions and choose the most effective
5. Communicate about the species and your actions

A Step-by-Step Approach

1. Understand the species and its habitat.

Find out about the species' preferences for food, cover, and water sources, as well as breeding requirements, and territory size.

2. Evaluate and define the problem specifically.

What exactly is the problem? The more specific you can be, the easier it will be to narrow down solutions. Try to define what, where, and when as well as why the problem is occurring.

For example, "Canada geese on the property" is not a very informative problem definition. "Canada geese are eating turf grass and interfering with golf play as well as leaving a substantial mess during March and April" is much more specific.

3. Survey your property— what are you doing to contribute to the problem?

Review your landscape management practices to determine whether something you are doing causes or exacerbates the problem.

For example, people feeding geese would be an obvious contributing factor. Landscape management practices such as removing shoreline vegetation around ponds or eliminating understory vegetation that may support natural predators would be additional practices that favor geese.

4. Review solutions and choose the most effective.

Evaluate a variety of control options. Consider your needs, the nature of the wildlife species, and your property— along with short and long-term effectiveness— when choosing your response to the problem.

For example, you might choose to increase pond vegetation to deter geese, enhance habitat overall, and get a dog to discourage geese from breeding on the property.

5. Communicate about the species and your actions.

Share your knowledge about the wildlife species and the nature of the problem. This will provide a valuable context for the control measures you choose. People are apt to support you when they know you fully understand the problem and are taking action to solve it.

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