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OPOSSUMS

The Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is a mammal about the size of a house cat (4 - 14 lbs). It has moderately long fur that ranges in color from white to dark gray and is frequently darker on the legs and lighter on the back. Its face is long and pointed with dark, rounded, paper-thin, hairless ears. Opossums have about 50 teeth. The tail is hairless, scaly, and prehensile. They have five toes on each foot, and the inside toe on the hind foot is opposable.

BIOLOGY

Opossums are the only marsupials in North America. They breed from January through November and produce two litters per year. The young are born 13 days after mating and develop in the pouch for 7 to 8 weeks. The young will stay with the female until they are weaned at 4 months. Except for females with young, opossums are solitary animals. Opossums are opportunistic omnivores, scavenging the flesh of dead animals, hunting small animals, reptiles and insects, and gleaning fruits and seeds. The opossum forages by searching rank vegetation, decomposing logs, and by climbing trees. In urban areas, opossums may visit bird feeding stations to eat seeds, raid garbage cans or dumpsters for refuse, and consume food intended for dogs or cats.

DAMAGE

When opossums live in or near inhabited buildings, the animals' smelly nesting habits and discharge of anal fluids can cause offensive odors. Opossums can damage buildings by pushing in screened vents or window screens, scattering insulation, and chewing electrical wiring. They frequently get into garbage.

DISEASE

All wildlife species including opossums can carry diseases and parasites. Opossums can be carriers of many diseases: tuberculosis, relapsing fever, herpes virus, tularemia, salmonella, spotted fever, toxoplasmosis, coccidiosis, trichomoniasis, Chagas Disease, yellow fever, and rabies (rarely). They are important reservoirs for leptospirosis (hemorrhagic jaundice) in wildlife and humans. Leptospirosis is transmitted through the urine and feces of infected animals. Humans can pick up the disease by eating unwashed produce or windfall fruit or by putting unwashed hands to their mouth (gum, cigarettes, etc.). Opossums can also be heavily infested with fleas, ticks, mites, and lice which are known carriers and transmitters of disease.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The California Department of Fish and Game regulations prohibit the relocation of opossums or other healthy wildlife. Healthy wildlife "trapped in towns or cities or removed from under buildings or otherwise taken or trapped because of human/animal conflict shall be immediately released in the area where trapped or disposed of (euthanized) as directed or authorized by the Department (of Fish and Game)." Only authorized wildlife rehabilitators may keep injured or orphaned wildlife.

(California Fish & Game Code 4000, 4001, 4180 and California Code of Regulations Title 14 Section 465.5(g)(1) and 679(f))

The Culver City Animal Services Officer is not trained in euthanasia techniques. Due to Fish and Game regulation, the Animal Services Officer cannot transport or relocate any healthy wild animal. Therefore, Culver City Animal Services does not provide healthy opossum trap and/or removal services. If citizens have a routine healthy opossum issue, they should contact a licensed private contractor of their choosing and the citizens will be responsible for any cost incurred.

The Culver City Animal Services Officer will respond to calls for service ONLY if the opossum is inside the living residence (not under the house, not around the house, not in the crawlspace, not in the yard, not in the attic, and not in a trap), is sick, is injured, is orphaned (for babies and the young), or is deceased.

PROBLEM PREVENTION

Wildlife is an important part of our environment. Raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, opossums, skunks, mallard ducks, Canada geese, and foxes can all be found in Culver City. They have adapted to or have found the modification we have made to the area appealing. While these animals are seldom a threat to people or domestic animals, there are several steps you can take to discourage wild animals from becoming a recurring problem. Opossums are attracted to urban areas by the easy accessibility of food, water and shelter. Eliminating the availability of all these factors will encourage opossums to leave. Prevention is the key to dealing with these wildlife nuisances and is the best all around solution to the problem both for the people and the wildlife. Addressing a problem requires much more work than prevention and is not nearly as satisfactory or effective.

A common misconception is that setting a live trap, catching and destroying the wildlife animal will take care of the nuisance. However, before too long another raccoon, skunk or opossum will move into the area. If it was a good habitat for one, it's just as good for another. Urban wildlife enjoys the easy life we often unknowingly provide for them; they don't like a hostile environment. Taking steps to deter them will encourage them to move on.

- Install a motion-activated or motion-sensored sprinkler. As these attach to a garden hose, you can mount the device at a higher level with plastic ties/zip ties and orient to the best optimum location. The motion-activated sprinkler can detect activity and when activated, it delivers a burst of water. The combination of the water spray, noise, and the motion of the sprinkler head is often effective at scaring off animal intruders and deterring skunks from specific areas near your home or garden. Check online search engines for videos of the motion-sensored sprinkler system in action. Internet stores sell the motion-sensored sprinkler devices for approximately \$45. Home improvement stores also carry the device for about \$110.
- Use metal or heavy plastic trash containers with tight fitting lids. Secure the lids with bungee cords, rope or sturdy cords. You may want to soak the cords or rope in a hot sauce or a commercial repellent. Spray a small amount of ammonia in and around all garbage cans. You may want to pour a cup of ammonia in the trash can every week after the trash has been picked up. You can also place moth balls (naphthalene) or blocks of camphor in a sealed container with holes in the lid to allow for the fumes to escape. Animals don't like the smell and will be discouraged from digging in your trash. Most animals invade human space when searching and foraging for food. If the food supply is easier to obtain elsewhere, the animals are more likely to leave your property alone.



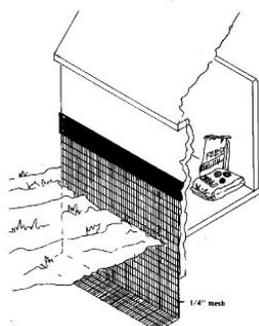
- Each fall and spring, inspect the exterior of your home for entrances that wildlife animals can use to get into the crawl space under your house. Even an opossum does not need a large hole to enter. Make sure soffit vents and gable end vents are fastened securely. If you find vent grills open or crawl spaces open under your house, you will need to secure the openings to prevent the easy access. You can attach ¼-inch hardware cloth over the vent on the inside of the attic for extra security. Plug gaps between your foundations and sill plates. Cover foundation vents with slotted metal vent covers.
- If opossums take up residence under a low deck, they may be excluded by using ¼-inch grid screening or solid metal flashing. Trench around the perimeter of the deck a minimum of 12 inches deep, insert screening in trench, and backfill. Attach top of screening to facade of deck with nails or fence post staples. Opossums can be excluded from buildings by covering foundation vents with slotted metal vent covers and by using ¼-inch grid



L-Shaped screen application around foundation.***



Power supply hole sealed with metal flashing.*



screening to cover attic vents and chimneys. Before completing final seal on the last entry point, make sure no animals are trapped inside. On the night before completing repairs, sprinkle cooking flour in the entrance hole and check for tracks the following morning. If no tracks are evident for three consecutive nights, no animals are likely present. You may wish to make a temporary one-way exit using ¼-inch grid screening. Form the screening into a cone or funnel shape that will permit animals to leave but not to reenter. The large end should be sized to encircle the entry hole and be attached over the hole to the facade of the deck or building with nails or fence post staples. The small end should face away from the house and be 4 to 6 inches in diameter.

- Opossums are not inclined to break through walls or fences that are intact and in reasonably good condition. Fix any openings or weak or loose places. It's much easier to prevent opossums from taking refuge under your deck or in burrows around your home than to deal with the problem. Opossums like to move into openings or dens created by other wildlife animals at the edge or the corner of a building or structure. You can discourage this behavior by placing hardware cloth six inches beneath the ground surface. Extend it out away from the base of your deck, tool shed foundation or other applicable structure by at least three feet. Most wildlife animals will prefer to dig right next to the structure and when they can't get through the hardware cloth, they will go somewhere else. The hardware cloth can then be covered by lattice work, or other cosmetic treatments, to improve the appearance.



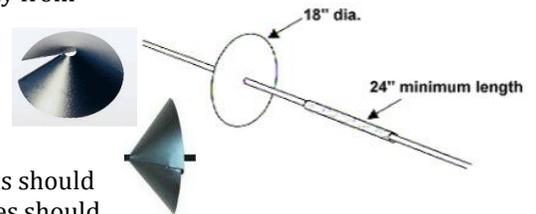
- Pet food is high protein, carbohydrates and fats. By having your pet's food available to the animals, it discourages them from their normal hunting and foraging behavior and will keep them returning to your property and yard. Pets should be fed during daylight hours and any leftovers removed immediately. Empty or remove the water bowls at night. Be sure to lock pet doors and openings at night.



- The best deterrent, besides removing the food source, is the installation of a metal guard and disc or cone baffles. To prevent opossums from climbing trees, poles, and other vertical structures, install a metal or heavy plastic barrier 6 to 8 feet above the ground. A metal guard can be secured around trees, pipes, posts, and other structures to keep opossums from climbing. It can be made from a piece of aluminum flashing or sheet metal, held together with wire, nails, or screws, and painted to blend in. 24-inch long aluminum or galvanized vent-pipe can serve as a pre-made barrier around a narrow support. A funnel-shaped piece of aluminum flashing can be fitted around a tree or other vertical structure. The outside edge of the flared metal should be at least 18 inches away from the support. Cut the material with tin snips and file down sharp edges. Opossums will attempt to use surrounding trees or structures as an avenue to access the area above the barrier. Keep opossums away from roof areas by trimming tree branches 10 feet from roof and keeping climbing plants trimmed away from roof and eave areas.



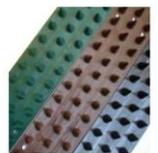
- Disc baffle and pipe sleeves prevent opossums from traveling on utility line wires, transformers, bird feeders and other aerial sites that have horizontal wires leading to them. Cut the plastic or PVC pipe lengthwise, spread it open, and place it over the wire. The sleeves should fit loosely so they rotate as the opossum tries to traverse them. Sleeves should be at least 24 inches long. Disc baffles or metal collars should be at least 18 inches to 2 feet wide and placed 6 feet to 8 feet above the ground. Collar edges should overlap and connect by springs to allow for tree growth.



- If you have vegetables in your garden or fruit trees in your yard, use a basic wire fence to surround your low-lying plants as they ripen and pick up all fruit when it drops off the tree. If you leave it exposed, it is just another food source for the skunks.



- Secure your perimeter by installing spike deterrent strips on your fences to eliminate the most common ways that raccoons will get into your garden. The plastic or polypropylene spikes are designed to provide maximum discomfort and minimum harm. Metal spikes or barbs on fencing are not permitted within Culver City. (Culver City Municipal Code 17.300.030)



- If you wish to have someone trap and remove the opossum, you can hire a private nuisance wildlife control operator which generally can be found in the Yellow Pages under "Animal Removal Services." If you do consider a professional wildlife removal specialist who has the required permits to legally trap and remove wildlife, please keep in mind that removal of nuisance wildlife does not necessarily mean that you have removed the problem. Oftentimes, removing the animal just opens up space for another animal to move in and claim territory.

Your best solution would be to make your home and property inhospitable and unappealing to the unwanted animals with habitat modifications and exclusion methods.