

CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-869

April 1977

opossums, skunks, raccoons

*(Didelphis virginiana, Mephitis mephitis and
Procyon lotor)*

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

BY GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

ALTHOUGH THESE FAMILIAR animals are dissimilar in appearance and classification, they all invade homes and other buildings, damage vegetable crops, and raid chicken coops and bee hives. Control methods are the same for both but with extra precautions for skunks.

EXCLUSION

When one of these animals takes up residence in an attic, under the crawl space of a home, underneath the floor of a barn or garage, or some portion of a building, the only effective control method is to deny entrance by making the necessary repairs, additions, or improvements. It is important, however, to exclude the animals as soon as they are noticed because it is not uncommon for them to raise young in human dwellings. Extra efforts must be made to remove the young physically before starting repairs to keep from sealing them in. Otherwise the owner must wait until the young are old enough to leave on their own.

It is imperative that any ground level repairs made to exclude these animals extend at least 12 in. into the ground and have an L-shaped bottom to prevent re-entry by digging. Skunks are especially adept at digging under repairs which do not extend into the ground.

POPULATION REDUCTION

Trapping

(These techniques require a permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR, if performed outside the regular hunting season.)

Where exclusion of these animals is not possible or where they are damaging crops or livestock, the only practical alternative is trapping, if many animals are involved. However, if animals have been allowed to live in an occupied dwelling for any length of time, trapping may be undesirable as it could leave dependent young within the dwelling.

Live trapping—All of these animals are easy to catch in live traps. Live traps

can be made or are available commercially. See "Sources of Supply." Traps should be baited with an odorous material such as sardines, dog food, bacon or small pieces of paper or wood soaked in used cooking oil or grease.

Any live trap used for racoons must be devised so that the racoons cannot open the trap door. Racoons are very adept at opening traps and are sometimes even capable of undoing latches that lock the trap door down if they can reach the latches with their paws. Move racoons at least 12 miles from point of capture before releasing.

When live-trapping skunks, it is important to make traps of solid material such as wood or metal. Wire traps must be wrapped in burlap, plastic or similar material so that the skunk cannot see out of the trap once it is caught. The trap, if handled gently, can then be moved with little danger of the skunk spraying. Move the skunk at least 5 miles from point of capture before releasing it. Most traps are constructed so that if they are turned upside down, the trap door will open. To be safe, attach one end of a long string or rope to a lower edge of the trap and then pull gently on the other end of the rope until the trap is turned upside down and the door falls open. The skunk will normally leave the trap shortly after the door drops open.

Steel trapping—If you prefer the steel trap, set a No. 1½ steel trap along a runway or in an area frequented by these animals. To reduce the possibility of injuring the animal, wrap the jaws of the trap with cloth and electrical tape. Check traps at least daily.

If it is necessary to entice the animal to a point where the trap can be set, place bait such as bacon or fish approximately 4 in. from the trap. Arrange sticks, stones or other material around the bait and the trap so that the only way the animal can reach the bait is to go across the trap.

Although not absolutely necessary, the trap will be more effective if it is set just beneath the surface of the ground, covered with a piece of cloth to prevent soil from fouling the trap mechanism,

and concealed with a thin layer of soil.

Trapping skunks with steel traps is not advisable unless one is prepared to destroy the skunk and to tolerate the odor that the trapping and destruction usually produces.

Shooting

If damage is being caused by one or two individuals, shooting may be practical. In most areas, the best time to look for these animals is shortly before and after sundown. Either a .22 caliber rifle or shotgun with No. 4 shot is satisfactory for racoons or opossums. A skunk may not spray if shot through the heart with a solid point .22 caliber long rifle bullet.

A permit is required to shoot racoons outside of the legal hunting season. Skunks and opossums may be shot any time by the landowner on his own land. Otherwise, a hunting license is required.

Neutralizing Skunk Odors

Although it is extremely difficult to eliminate skunk odors completely, several substances reduce the odor to unnoticeable level unless you closely sniff the material. If the odor is in soil around or beneath the home, the best neutralizing agent is chloride of lime applied to the soil. This material kills plants.

When the odor is on materials such as cloth, hair or skin, tomato juice or vinegar applied liberally and thoroughly rubbed on the material will greatly reduce the odor.

Inside a house, the only effective treatment is an aerosol mist deodorant. One of the most effective is neutroleum alpha, available from many pest control operators or from Fritzsche Brothers, Inc., Port Authority Building, 76 Ninth Ave., New York, N.Y.

Other effective deodorants are isobornyl acetate based materials. New deodorants are continually appearing on the market and some are reported to reduce skunk odors effectively. Most household deodorants available in supermarkets are not strong enough.

CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-870

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rabbits

(*Sylvalagus floridanus*)

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

BY GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

THE FAMILIAR COTTONTAIL RABBIT is most commonly associated with farmland, but it may occur in suburban and even urban land where there is sufficient food and cover. Occasionally, it becomes a pest consuming garden vegetables and flowers, and gnawing on the bark of fruit trees or ornamental shrubbery. Then control is usually desired.

EXCLUSION

Rabbits that forage in small gardens may be entirely excluded by encircling the garden with a low wood or wire fence. Small decorative fences will suffice providing they are at least 18 in. high and the spaces between fence parts are small enough to prevent a young rabbit from squeezing through. A length of ½-in. mesh chicken wire encircling the garden will also effectively do the job. The chicken wire need only be loosely attached to supporting stakes.

At the end of the growing season, the chicken wire can be rolled up and stored for use the next year. Some garden owners encircle the garden with an electrically charged wire 6 in. off the ground; use such a device with caution.

Exclude rabbits from trees and shrubbery by wrapping the base of the plant with a light-gauge metal band. It should extend above the average snow depth.

REPULSION

Several repellants can prevent rabbits from consuming plants. Many are read-

ily available in stores, but can also be obtained from places listed in Sources of Supply. Thiram produces the most consistent results.

POPULATION REDUCTION

Trapping

In winter, rabbits are easy to trap with live traps. See "Sources of Supply" for commercial sources of live traps. Unless it's very intensive, winter trapping will not prevent spring damage, and rarely reduces the population enough to prevent late summer damage. Bait traps with corn or apples. Begin trapping in the fall and continue until early spring because trapping during the late spring and summer is usually difficult.

Once a rabbit is caught in a trap, it is usually unnecessary to bait that trap again because the odor in the trap will

normally attract more rabbits. Once the rabbits are trapped they should either be destroyed or moved at least five miles from the trap site and released in an appropriate habitat.

Rabbit trapping requires a trapping license during the regular trapping season. A special permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR is necessary outside of the regular trapping season.

Shooting

Shooting with a .22 caliber rifle or shotgun can effectively reduce rabbit damage if only a few rabbits are involved. Shooting is most efficient in the late evening or early morning.

A permit is required from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR, if shooting is done outside of the regular hunting season.

Repellant	Formulation	Use
Blood	15% dust	Apply in a 2-ft. wide band 6-8 in. from plants to be protected. Wet thoroughly. Reapply every 2 weeks or until plants are beyond susceptible stage.
Thiram	7-11% 20% (dilute 1 to 1 with water) 42% (dilute 1 qt. with 1 qt. sticker in water)	Spray on plants before damage starts. Do not apply to plant parts to be eaten by humans or domestic animals. Reapply to protect new growth. Fruit trees can be sprayed only during dormant season. Apply only when plants are dry.