

## Controlling Animal Nuisances

While most wild mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrate animals are beneficial, at times some of them conflict with people's interests, and control is needed. Don't expect animal damage control to be 100 per cent effective or permanent. The controls described here will reduce or eliminate nuisances, but may have to be repeated.

Federal, state, and local laws bear on many control methods. **Check with local or state law enforcement officers about regulations and permit requirements.** For details on bird and mammal damage control beyond the brief information below, get leaflets in the "Vertebrate Pest Control" series from the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service.

### Muskrats and Woodchucks

Muskrats and woodchucks dig burrows that cause pond bank cave-ins, may weaken dams or result in leaks. They prefer to dig in steep banks. Muskrats burrow from beneath the pond surface, while woodchucks typically tunnel into the downstream side of dams.

Muskrats make burrow entrances 6 to 18 inches below water line, sometimes deeper. Burrows may penetrate 9 feet or more, but average length is 5 to 6 feet. The tunnel leads to a dry nest chamber above water level.

Trapping and shooting are ways of controlling muskrats and woodchucks, but burrow fumigants are legal only for woodchucks. Keeping earthen dams mowed reduces cover that woodchucks and muskrats like.

Removing cattails, arrowhead, and other emergent plants deprives muskrats of food and cover. Armoring the shore with rock and other hard materials will discourage burrowing.

Controlling a muskrat population is usually feasible only if the pond is far from other muskrat habitat. If near other waterways or wetlands, muskrats will continually move in. In such cases, it may be better to **control the damage** by reinforcing the embankments rather than trying to control the muskrats.

#### Trapping Muskrats

Muskrats are easily trapped. In the legal trapping season, no license is needed to trap on your own land, and the pelts will then be prime and bring top prices. If you get a state permit to trap for damage control, you may kill muskrats at any time and with kinds of traps that would otherwise be illegal. See a DNR conservation officer for additional information.

Without a special permit, you may, in Michigan's trapping season, use bait sets, slide sets, float sets, or under-ice sets. Fasten traps to stakes set in deep water so muskrats quickly drown and don't twist or gnaw feet off and escape. No trap may be set within 6 feet of a muskrat house, hole, or home. Only steel leg-hold or body-gripping traps may be used. Traps must have a jaw-spread of 5 inches or less. Traps in use or in the user's possession afield must have an attached metal tag bearing the trapper's name and address.

With a special state permit for muskrat control on your own land, the distance rule doesn't apply, and you may also use "repeater trap"

