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# Getting to Know Raccoons



- 🦉 Raccoons are highly adaptable. They prefer forest habitats but have adjusted to a variety of environments, including urban and suburban areas where they thrive in close association with humans.
- 🦉 Though nocturnal, raccoons are sometimes active during the day.
- 🦉 Raccoons are omnivorous. They eat fruit, vegetables, nuts, insects, and small animals, including crayfish, crabs, frogs, and fish.
- 🦉 Raccoons do not hibernate, but they do live off stored body fat when food is scarce during the winter.
- 🦉 Raccoons make dens in hollow trees, rock crevices, or burrows dug by other animals and in storm sewers, crawl spaces, chimneys, and attics.
- 🦉 Except during extreme weather or when a mother is denning with her young, raccoons do not occupy a den for more than one or two days. Females that are disturbed will often move their young to new dens.

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## Give wildlife a helping hand.

The goal of the Mercer County Wildlife Center is to protect the future of native wildlife species through education, rehabilitation, and release.

You can help the Center meet this goal by donating your time or resources.

### Volunteer opportunities:

- 🦉 Animal technicians - Dependable, compassionate people to help feed and administer medications to the animals in our care.
- 🦉 Community outreach volunteers - Enthusiastic people to greet the public at community events, raise funds by selling merchandise, and educate others about wildlife by distributing literature.
- 🦉 Publications - Writers, copy editors, and layout people to help develop our newsletters, brochures, and handouts.
- 🦉 Publicity - Volunteers to write press releases that help spread the word about the Center.
- 🦉 Flea market - People to help run our flea market fund raisers. We also gratefully accept certain donated items.

For more information about these volunteer positions, call the Volunteer Coordinator at (609) 397-8435.

### Wish list items:

Caring for the injured, ill, or displaced animals that come through our door involves various supplies, many of which you probably use in your own home. Visit our web site to see our wish list.

# Mercer County Wildlife Center



## Coexisting with Raccoons



Overflowing, uncovered, or easily accessible garbage cans provide an open invitation for hungry raccoons.

P.O. Box 161  
Titusville, NJ 08560  
(609) 883-6606

[www.mercercounty.org/mcwc/mcwc.htm](http://www.mercercounty.org/mcwc/mcwc.htm)

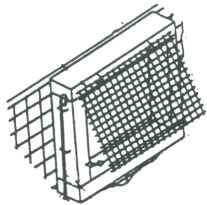
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# Getting to Know Raccoons

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- Male raccoons have overlapping home ranges. Unrelated raccoons tend to avoid each other, but several may share a communal den during winter storms.
- Breeding season extends from late winter through early spring, with females generally giving birth between April and June to an average litter of three or four young. They remain in their birth den until they are about seven weeks old; then, their mother moves them to a series of alternate dens. In some parts of the country, young raccoons spend their first winter with their mothers; in other parts of the country, families disperse in the fall.



**One-way Door**

Illustration from the Humane Control of Wildlife in Cities and Towns, Humane Society of the U.S.



# Coexisting with Raccoons

Once habituated to people, raccoons can become bold and their presence, especially in large numbers, can pose problems for home and landowners. The most effective way to deal with raccoons is to modify their habitat so that they will not be attracted to human-provided sources of food and shelter. Here are some ideas:

- Never feed them** – Dispose of food scraps and trash in a metal can, and make sure the lid fits tightly. Secure the lid with rope or a chain.
- Avoid leaving pet food outdoors** – If you cannot avoid feeding dogs or cats outdoors, pick up food and water bowls, as well as leftovers and spilled food, well before dusk. Never leave food outside at night.
- Lock pet doors** – Lock pet doors at night and do not leave pet food near the opening. If a raccoon does venture inside, remain calm, close surrounding interior doors, leave the room, and allow the animal to find its way out.
- Use bright lights or make noise** – Raccoons sometimes raid gardens to eat fruits and vegetables, particularly

crops such as grapes and corn. You may be able to deter them until crops are ready to be harvested by using bright lights, especially those activated by motion, or by making noise when the animals are present.

- Cap chimney openings** – Raccoons sometimes find shelter in uncapped chimneys. Prevent potential problems by capping all chimney openings. If you suspect raccoons are present, do not try to smoke them out.

Raccoons may also seek shelter under porches, in crawl spaces, or in attics where they can enter through boards or large holes. From early spring through summer, assume there are young, and wait until they are old enough for their mother to move them before you attempt to exclude them. When you are sure no young are present, you can prevent them from returning by installing bright, flashing lights, turning on a radio to a talk show, and hanging mesh bags filled with moth balls or rags soaked in ammonia. After the animals leave, tack a sheet of plastic over the entry. Be sure to leave the light and radio on until there is no sign of activity and then seal the entry.

Thanks to the HOWL Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Washington state for providing the information in this pamphlet.