

# The Soap Box

## Help me, I need to know

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**I WORK IN AN URBAN AREA.** Well, my job really is not in urban wildlife management, but my job office is in an urban area. Because part of my work involves being a wildlife disease specialist, many calls from the public get transferred to me.

Times have changed for wildlife management (Clay 2007, Miller 2007). In the 1980s, the nuisance wildlife calls I received were from the outskirts of a Maine city by rural homeowners who had porcupines (*Erithizon dorsatum*) in the attic, white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) browsing their apple trees, or coyotes (*Canis latrans*)

depredating their sheep. The solutions to these problems were relatively easy and lethal means were acceptable. Twenty years later, in a large Tennessee urban area, such nuisance wildlife problems have been supplanted by others involving bats and gray squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in the attics and walls of houses, coyotes and black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) depredating pets, eastern chipmunks (*Tamias striatus*) eating up the garden, and white-tailed deer chewing the shrubs. Hardly a day that goes by that I do not receive at least 1 of these calls—sometimes many—as they seem to run in waves.

The biggest problem now is that the easy and lethal solution is no longer acceptable to the public. Times have changed. Urban, suburban, and exurban residents are still annoyed by problem wildlife, likely more so than before; but, they are no longer able or willing to pursue the lethal route (Storm et al. 2007, Bingham 2007). If the wildlife cannot be excluded from

the affected area, the public is unwilling to have the animals killed. As Rutberg (2007) has aptly noted, our culture has become more humane

and ecologically aware and no longer accepts the lethal destruction of animals, regardless of the damage these animals inflict. I talk with many individuals who do not wish the animals to be harmed. “The animals can’t help it that we have moved into their neighborhood,” is not an uncommon statement. In short, they want relief, but they don’t want the animals to suffer because humans have

taken over the land that the animals once had to themselves. I have had some complaints because homeowners were concerned that the red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) living in their neighborhood would be hit by cars.

So, what can I tell people when they call for advice? I need help. Knowledgeable practitioners need to provide the information they have in their heads, and science needs to focus on the problems of nonlethally controlling damage. Live-trapping is commonly used to remove problem wildlife and can be used to remove foxes for their own safety. However, the problem remains of where to put the trapped animals so that they don’t continue to run afoul of human desires. Live-trapping and euthanizing is not always acceptable solutions.

Science needs to address some very basic questions that have very practical implications, like knowing the handedness of coyotes (Bodenchuk 2007). Some very basic knowledge on how animals live in a human-developed



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landscape are critical to providing practical solutions to very real problems. The nuisance and damage control bible, *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage* (Timm 1983), and many of the cooperative extension publications are state-of-the-art because not much has changed. What there is of current science is scattered among many journals and books that are unavailable to me or my colleagues in agency offices. When you search the Internet for information, you find that much is recycled from Timm (1983) and that very little of the latest information is synthesized into useful information that homeowners, much less agency personnel who are trying to help people solve their problems, can use. While the rich research base of USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Research Center (National Wildlife Research Center 2008), among other agencies, is available on the Internet, it is not summarized or synthesized into practical how-to publications that many agency managers can utilize. One must sift through methods that have failed to find methods that work. Help!

My plea is for science to help me and others like me by asking us for the questions that we need to have addressed in research and by synthesizing and updating resources that we can use. Ask about what is concerning the public, and develop approaches to solve the problems. The current problems are not going away very soon, and it is likely that as human population density increases, there will be more problems we haven't seen yet. \*

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