

RACCOONS



GENERAL INFORMATION

The raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is widely distributed throughout California, especially in heavily populated and urbanized areas in Orange County. Raccoons are medium-sized mammals weighing from 8 to 12 pounds as juveniles and to as much as 25 to 30 pounds as adults. They are well muscled and highly agile animals, being more than a match for other wild or domestic animals of their size. A bushy tail, with five to seven black rings, and a black mask on a whitish face characterizes the raccoon. Raccoons have five well-developed and elongated toes on their front and hind feet (resembling small human hands), which contain large numbers of sensory receptors that allow it to identify food by shape and consistency without actually seeing it. Raccoons are solitary animals and do not live in groups, but sometimes females may den together during the birthing and kit raising period.

BIOLOGY AND HABITAT

Raccoons generally produce one litter a year, with three to five "kits," born in April, May, or June. However, kit births have been recorded through to September or October in Orange County. Their diet consists of fruit, grains, eggs, poultry, vegetables, nuts, mollusks, fish, insects, rodents, carrion, pet food, and garbage. Raccoons are generally nocturnal (active at night) and den in hollow trees, drain pipes, under decks, abandoned burrows, storage sheds, and in homes and buildings.

DAMAGE

In urban areas, raccoons may damage buildings (especially attics and roof structures), gardens, fruit trees, lawns, and garbage cans in their search for food. They relish domestic dog and cat food and may congregate in large numbers in yards where pet food is left out. In rural areas, raccoons may feed on farm crops and poultry.

DISEASE AND HUMAN HEALTH

Raccoons are susceptible to many diseases and parasites of the domestic dog and cat, some of which may be transmissible to humans. *Baylisascaris procyonis*, the roundworm of raccoons may cause an often fatal condition in humans called larval migrans. Most Orange County raccoons have *B. procyonis* and shed millions of infective eggs in stools in urban neighborhoods.

CONTROL

Historically, trapping and removal programs have been recommended to control raccoons. In urban areas with high raccoon populations, these programs are of very short-term benefit at best, because of the immigration of new raccoons filling the void created by removal. Reducing available food and shelter are the most effective methods of controlling urban raccoons. To accomplish this, homeowners should make sure their yards do not contain brush or junk piles, trash, or decaying fruit from fruit trees. Leaving pet food out for extended periods and feeding wildlife should be avoided.



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