

Managing Nuisance Animals on the Oak Ridge Reservation



Nuisance wildlife problems

Most wildlife on the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) are beneficial members of natural communities, but others can cause both *facility* and *human* problems. Raccoons, opossums, skunks, and groundhogs enter or burrow under buildings or climb into garbage cans or dumpsters looking for food, shelter, or den sites to rear their young. White-tailed deer dash unexpectedly into roads, causing vehicle collisions that may result in serious human injuries and major property damage.

White-tailed deer are common on the ORR. Drivers should slow down on ORR roads and be aware that deer are most active in the early evening and early morning and during the fall mating season.

Bird and bat droppings (e.g., from Canada geese that congregate near buildings) are unsightly. They can also spread disease organisms, have a caustic effect that defaces and can accelerate deterioration of building materials, and lower water quality in lakes and ponds.



Invertebrate stings can cause allergic reactions, and black widow and brown recluse spiders and fire ants can inflict painful bites and stings on people and domestic animals. Raccoons, skunks, and bats can spread rabies or distemper. Birds and gray squirrels harbor a variety of ectoparasites (e.g., fleas, lice, ticks). Ticks may carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever and other diseases. Microscopic fungi in bat droppings and hantavirus in rat and mouse droppings can cause respiratory diseases.

*Nesting geese are often aggressive toward humans.
(Photo © R. K. McConathy)*

Remedies

Staff members at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) have developed a *Nuisance Wildlife Education and Prevention Plan* that presents various ways to reduce nuisance wildlife problems. Persistence is the key to managing most nuisance wildlife.

Prevention. The best solution for managing most nuisance animal problems is prevention. After making sure that the nuisance animal is not trapped inside, holes in buildings are sealed to prevent entry by skunks, raccoons, and snakes. Other openings into buildings (e.g., crawl-space vents, windows, roof vents, soffits) are kept in good repair.



Known for its engineering skills in building dams, the beaver can sometimes damage an area when its pond floods too far. (Photos at left and right © R. K. McConathy; center photo by Tom Smylie, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

Barriers can be installed to prevent groundhogs from burrowing under buildings and keep vultures and other birds from roosting where unwanted. Dumpsters that are not animal-proof are fitted with latches.

Managed hunts. Deer hunts, initiated in 1985, have decreased the number of deer-vehicle collisions on ORR roads from almost 300 a year to an average of 135. Canada goose hunts, initiated in 2006, are used to reduce the resident goose population.

Trapping, removal, and harassment. An active trapping program has been implemented in developed areas of the ORR to capture raccoons, opossums, skunks, and groundhogs. Beavers are trapped and removed when their activities cause flooding that impacts facilities. Bats can be captured using a hand net. Decoys can lure vultures into large walk-in traps. Canada geese are rounded up in June during their flightless period and relocated to remote sites. Some nuisance animals (e.g., vultures, Canada geese) can be displaced by using motion-activated sprinklers, noisemakers, and cylindrical rolling perches.



The northern copperhead is the only venomous snake on the ORR. Like all snakes, these serve an important role in the ecosystem by, for example, helping control rodent populations. At certain times of the year, they may sun themselves on warm surfaces, such as walkways, parking lots, and roads.



Raccoons can easily climb to upper floors between walls and even enter offices through loose ceiling tiles. They have an uncanny ability to open containers, cabinets, and even refrigerators in their search for food. They can be live-trapped for removal from buildings and near facilities.

Nest destruction. Fire ant nests are treated where they are found. Nests of paper wasps and bald-faced hornets can be knocked down when the insects are not active. Bird nests are destroyed when no eggs or young are present. After nests have been destroyed, structural modifications or other institutional controls are taken to eliminate the location as a desirable nesting site.

Change in human behavior. People should not feed native birds in places where food can attract nuisance species. Staff members working outside should use repellents to repulse insects and ticks. Drivers should exercise caution on ORR roads, particularly at times when deer are active.

Precautions in managing nuisance animals

Nuisance animal control must be implemented by those with special training. Wildlife managers learn the appropriate methods and gear to use when trapping and removing nuisance animals. In addition, protected bird and bat species can legally be controlled only by people

with specific training. Untrained individuals should contact the ORNL wildlife managers if they encounter a nuisance animal problem.

For more detailed information on nuisance animals on the ORR, contact Neil Giffen, the ORNL wildlife management coordinator, at 865-241-9421, giffennr1@ornl.gov.

For more information about the ORR National Environmental Research Park, contact Pat Parr, the ORNL natural resources manager, at 865-576-8123, parrpd@ornl.gov, or check the National Environmental Research Park website at <http://www.esd.ornl.gov/facilities/nerp/index.html>.



Paper wasps can inflict a painful sting when their nests are disturbed.