

# Complex Considerations for Urban Wildlife

**Dennis Hinkamp**

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In the heat of the summer, all living things – including plants, people, and pets – are looking for relief from the heat in the form of water and food. Because of this, it's not surprising that wildlife are attracted to our comparatively lush environment.

"City landscapes are irrigated and highly predictable, whereas the wildlands where they come from fluctuate," said David Stoner, Utah State University Extension wildlife specialist. "We offer shrubs in the winter, tulips in the spring, and our vegetable gardens in the fall. Likewise, ski areas, parks, and golf courses look like meadows to deer, elk, and other herbivorous wildlife."

Stoner said we have created a reliable, tasty habitat for wildlife. The hillsides are turning brown, yet we keep watering our city landscapes, and we even provide "subsidies" of food and water for them.

"Is this compassionate or counterproductive?" he asked. "It's probably both."

Stoner said providing wildlife with food and water can lead to a chain reaction of events. Bird feeders attract songbirds. Songbirds attract predator birds. The bird seed that falls on the ground attracts rodents. Rodents attract snakes. Larger wildlife, such as raccoons, can be attracted to water, and in turn, help themselves to your chickens. Even larger wildlife might attack your dog. Deer not only attract mountain lions, but they also eat gardens and become traffic hazards. And, though it makes for funny social media videos, you probably don't want a bear in your hot tub or pool.

"Despite this, there's no need to completely abstain from helping wildlife," he said. "Many homeowners enjoy attracting birds, specifically thirsty hummingbirds. But if you are going to put out a bird feeder, place it high enough that other animals cannot reach it. Be sure to clean up any spilled seed from feeders, and put up fences high enough to keep deer out of your vegetable gardens."

Stoner said that whether you intentionally attract them or not, at some point you might find the added wildlife to be a nuisance. If this is the case, there are specific guidelines for trapping and disposal.



A rabbit splooting (lying flat). Wildlife and pets often do this in the summer to cool off.

Many animals classified as a nuisance may be killed without a license, he said. Trapping is a legal option in many cases, but first consult the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) and review current regulations. Some animals require specific permits or notification prior to trapping. Moving trapped animals to new environments is not permitted, due to ecological risks and low survival rates for relocated animals. They may also spread disease. There are exceptions for species with conservation status, such as for the Utah prairie dog and beavers, which may be relocated by wildlife professionals only. In these cases, residents should contact UDWR regional offices for assistance.

Stoner suggests the publication, "What to Do Now That You've Trapped a Nuisance Wild Animal," by USU Extension experts Nicki Frey and Cory Farnsworth, which gives specific information and guidelines.

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