



Nadine Carbona

Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are those salt and peppergray, masked critters that are quite common throughout the Bay Area, particularly in wild lands, along urban creeks, and occasionally in your backyard. Normally, raccoons don't get much of our attention because they are active mostly at night. Sometimes our paths cross with disturbing results. Understanding the habits of raccoons can help prevent an unpleasant encounter and help us both to be better neighbors.

In the Wild

Raccoons are secretive and rarely seen in the daytime. They usually spend the day resting in a hollow tree or log, under a ledge, or in a ground burrow. At night, they prowl along creeks, ponds, lake banks, meadows, and travel storm drains in search of insects, crayfish, frogs, fish, bird's eggs, and small snakes. They also eat fruit, nuts, and grain. Their habit of rubbing their hands over potential food items under water isn't "washing." Instead, this habit enhances their sense of touch and helps them distinguish edible from non-edible food.

A full-grown raccoon may weigh 35 pounds or more and is quite a match for most predators, including large dogs. Raccoons generally live alone, except during the breeding season and while they are caring for their young. Females give birth to as many as seven young between April and May. The young follow the parents, in training, all summer long and are ready to live on their own by fall. The young can move several miles away from their birth site in search of food, or a place to den and set up their own territories. Food availability in the wild is one of nature's ways of balancing the numbers of animals with the environment's ability to support them.



Darrol Shillingburg

In Your Yard

Residents of hillside and creek side homes are the most likely to encounter raccoons. In years when food in the wild is scarce, rac-

coons are more likely to venture further into neighborhoods. In lean years, raccoons are more prone to dig golf-ball sized holes in your lawns and garden searching for grubs. They also tend to become more aggressive over food left out for dogs and cats.

Although it's always nice to know that nature is nearby, leaving food outdoors for your dogs and cats encourages raccoons to revisit your yard. This increases the chances of a dangerous encounter between a raccoon and you, your child, or pet. Raccoons are quite capable of inflicting serious injury to your pets, if harassed by them. Raccoons in the Bay Area are known to occasionally transmit rabies, even though they may not appear ill or disoriented.

What You Can Do

While watching wildlife from a distance is a favored pastime for many people, close encounters should be avoided.

You can avoid unpleasant encounters by:

- Keeping pet food indoors.
- Closing off all access ways that lead into the crawl space or basement under your house, porch, or attic.
- Not attempting to pet, handle, or capture them, even though they may appear tame.
- Placing a protective fire screen over the top of your chimney, where a raccoon can enter to den.
- Using garbage cans with either heavy lids or ones that snap on.



Dan Suzio

If the Animal is Under Your House or in the Attic

If you already have a raccoon living under your house, porch, attic, or in your chimney, do not close the space off until you are absolutely sure they are out. During cold weather, raccoons may sleep for several days at a time. But, during spring through fall, you can determine whether or not they are gone, by placing a large piece of paper over the hole at the exit point late at night. If the paper remains unbroken by the next morning, they have most likely not returned. Close the space firmly, since they may try to re-enter later. To discourage re-entry and their presence, you may use ammonia-soaked rags or mothballs around the covered hole. Avoid physical contact at all times.

If the Animal is in Your House

If you find a raccoon inside your house, having gained access through a pet door or open window, then attempt to "herd" the animal back into the room with the opening. Use a broom or other long-handled item.

If it's a floor level opening, then simply close the door and wait until nighttime. The raccoon will leave under the cover of darkness. If the opening is a bathroom window, then place a board from the floor to the window ledge before you attempt to "herd" the animal into the room. Again, close the door and wait until it leaves on its own. Keep your pets and children away until the raccoon is gone. Never attempt to grab a live raccoon.

Trapping and Relocation.

Trapping and relocation is not recommended for private individuals, even when someone is willing to do it for you. Removing an animal does not eliminate the problem of having a pest in your yard; it only opens the way for a replacement. Furthermore, it is illegal to release any animals in Regional Parklands.



Sharing the World Together

There are a great number of wild creatures that visit neighborhoods and yards. For the most part, we can coexist quite easily. In fact, populations of butterflies, lady beetles, birds, some mammals, and many other creatures are enhanced by our presence. Raccoons provide some benefit to people by eating insects and mice. Learning to live together will help create a healthier environment.

Text by Ron Russo
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Visitor Centers & Recreation Services

ARDENWOOD HISTORIC FARM
Fremont 510-796-0199, awvisit@ebparks.org

BLACK DIAMOND MINES
Antioch 925-757-2620, bdvisit@ebparks.org

COYOTE HILLS REGIONAL PARK
Fremont 510-795-9385, chvisit@ebparks.org

CRAB COVE at CROWN BEACH
Alameda 510-521-6887, ccove@ebparks.org

SUNOL REGIONAL WILDERNESS
Sunol 925-862-2601, svisit@ebparks.org


**TILDEN NATURE AREA/EEC
and LITTLE FARM**
Berkeley 510-525-2233, tnairea@ebparks.org

AQUATICS UNIT
510-690-6620, dmccormick@ebparks.org

REGIONAL PARKS BOTANIC GARDEN
c/o Tilden Regional Park, Berkeley
510-841-8732
bgarden@ebparks.org, www.nativeplants.org

OUTDOOR RECREATION UNIT
District-wide programs 510-544-2512
recreation@ebparks.org

This brochure is provided as a public service of the Interpretive and Recreation Services Department of the East Bay Regional Park District.

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