

# **WHEN RACCOONS BECOME A PROBLEM**



## ***History and Habits***

The raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), also called “coon”, is a stocky mammal about 2 to 3 feet (61 to 91 cm) long, weighing 10 to 30 pounds (4.5 – 13.5 kg.). Characteristic features include short, pointed ears, a long pointed snout and grayish-brown fur covering the body. The raccoon’s most distinguishing features are the black mask around the eyes and the black rings circling the long, bushy tail.

Raccoons are not native to Prince Edward Island but occur naturally in the adjacent provinces. They were brought here during the early part of the twentieth century to be farmed for their valuable fur, and they subsequently escaped and thrived. They live throughout Prince Edward Island but are common in agricultural areas, marshes, streams and ponds. Raccoons are very adaptable and are also found in urban and suburban areas where mature trees, attics, sheds, and storm sewers are used as dens.

Raccoons are excellent climbers and are very dexterous. They are most active at night, seeking refuge during the daylight hours in hollow trees, dense vegetation, under sheds, old buildings, barns, chimneys or other cavity spaces. During the winter months raccoons usually “den-up” for the coldest periods; this is not a true hibernation and they often venture out during warm spells.

Raccoons eat a variety of foods including insects, frogs, bird eggs, fruit, and garden vegetables, especially corn and grain. Because of their ability to live in association with humans, and their varied food preferences and denning habits, people often consider raccoons to be a nuisance.

## ***Reproduction and Predation***

Raccoons mate from late January through March. After a gestation period of 63 days, one to six young (average 3-4) are born between

mid-April and mid-May. They are generally well developed at birth, being well furred except for their tails, but their eyes don’t open until they are three weeks old. The female and young usually remain together during their first winter but break up after the young reach sexual maturity during the spring. They have few natural predators; coyotes capture some and great-horned owls will prey on young.

## ***Legal Status***

In P.E.I. raccoons are classed as furbearers and game animals and receive legal protection. If you wish to trap or shoot raccoons you must first obtain a license from the Fish and Wildlife Division. This does not apply if raccoons are caught alive and released.

## ***Damage Identification and Solutions***

Raccoons may cause damage or problems in a variety of ways. Their distinctive tracks often provide evidence of their involvement. Garbage cans can be “raccoon-proofed” by securing the lids with elastic tie-downs available at most hardware stores. In addition, they should be fastened in an upright position, which prevents the raccoons from tipping them over. Metal or wooden stakes placed through the carrying handles and driven into the ground are effective. Wooden or metal garbage can bins with latching doors provide the ultimate in security.

Raccoons may gain access to roofs and chimneys by way of trees, trellises, downspouts, vines or shrubs. Keeping raccoons off the roof is desirable but may not always be practical. Therefore, efforts should be made to keep them out of the house by replacing loose shingles, repairing holes, or installing chimney caps or wire screening. Be certain that all the animals are out before final exclusion procedures are completed.

## Removal

Where raccoons are plentiful, hunters and trappers should be encouraged to harvest surplus animals during the regular open seasons. The local Conservation Officer may be able to suggest competent individuals. Where this option is not practical, the use of live traps is usually the best alternative.

“Coons” are relatively easy to catch in live traps, but it takes a sturdy trap to hold one. Traps should be at least 10 x 12 x 32 inches (25 x 30 x 80 cm) and constructed of a heavy-gauge wire. For single-door traps, the back should be placed against a wall, rock, or other solid object. It is important to ensure that the back portion of the trap be tightly screened with small (0.5 in. or 1.3 cm) mesh screening to prevent the animals from reaching through the sides to pull out the bait. Sometimes it helps to partially cover the trap with brush. Staking down the trap will help prevent raccoons from rolling the trap over. Some hardware stores or trapping supply dealers may have suitable commercial models available for sale. Pest control companies or hardware rental firms usually stock large live-traps for raccoons or skunks (See Diagram).

Barrel traps can be economically constructed by placing an open-topped 45-gallon (200 litre) barrel next to a fencepost. Drill a few holes around the bottom and bait it with canned pet food, sardines, or other smelly foods. Any raccoons entering through the top should be unable to jump or climb out. Check the barrel every morning to prevent unnecessary suffering.

Raccoons caught by live trapping should be relocated at least 10 miles (16 km) from the capture site, in a remote wooded location. If you prefer to euthanize the animal, please contact either staff of the Fish and Wildlife Division or your local Conservation Officer for directions on humane methods to employ.

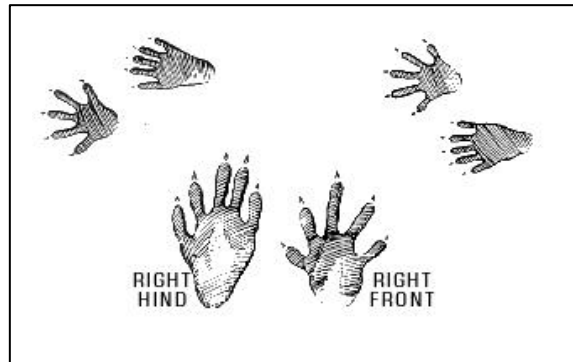
## Parasites and Diseases

Raccoons are host to a number of parasites and diseases that can infect people or pets. Canine distemper is one example. Although no cases have been reported in Prince Edward Island, there is also the potential for rabies. Any raccoons exhibiting abnormal behaviour should be avoided, and Fish and Wildlife staff advised. Dead raccoons should be buried. Try not to touch the carcass, but if it is unavoidable, wear disposable rubber gloves and wash well afterward.

## Help with Trapping and Removal

Nuisance animal control operators can trap problem animals for a prescribed fee. There are a number of licensed individuals who are prepared to assist anyone with a raccoon problem. Their names can be obtained from the Fish and Wildlife Division office (902 368-4683).

## RACCOON TRACKS

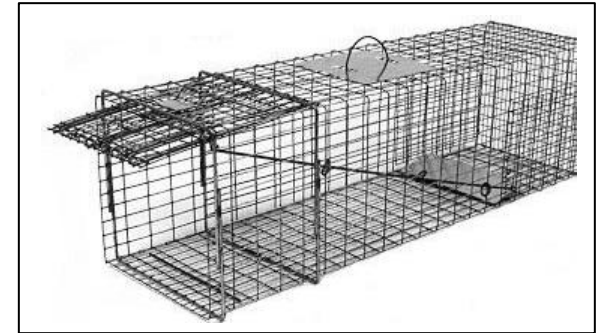


## Sick or Diseased Animals

Any sick or diseased raccoon should be reported to the Fish and Wildlife Division. Sick and diseased animals will be forwarded to the Atlantic Veterinary College for post-mortem

analysis. Individuals will in turn be notified of the College's findings.

## HEAVY-GAUGE WIRE LIVE-TRAP SUITABLE FOR RACCOONS



For more information on raccoons or other wildlife topics please contact:

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