

THE NEED FOR URBAN ANIMAL CONTROL

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The relationship between humans and animals has evolved over many centuries; in the beginning it was very violent. As humans moved from a cave to a village and later to a farm, they protected their property with whatever means were available. Spears, traps and later poisons and rifles were used to handle wildlife problems. As methods of providing life's necessities were refined, people moved from the farms into the cities. Today, many former city dwellers are moving out of town into a more rural setting. Although the relationship between wildlife and humans has changed from its violent beginnings, competition still exists - it is just less dramatic.

In the 1960s, metropolitan populations expanded by 17.7% while those in nonmetropolitan areas expanded only 4.4%. However, preliminary data from the 1980 census indicate that rural growth in the 1970s was twice that of metropolitan areas (Danielson 1981, Committee on Impacts of Emerging Agricultural Trends on Fish and Wildlife Habitat 1982). Families are moving into the country not to farm but to enjoy the amenities of living in a serene, wooded environment (USDA 1977). With these families come 4-lane roads and businesses that were formerly confined to cities. Prime farmland and woodlots have been developed into shopping centers and medical suites. I term this expansion of the city into the country "rural urbanization." Each year in the United States 1 million hectares of prime farmland is converted into nonfarm use (Council on Environmental Quality 1981). To make up for this loss of productive land and keep production levels the same, additional hectares must be cleared or more production must be coaxed from remaining croplands. All of these practices reduce wildlife habitat and force animals to adapt to the results of humans' activities (Leedy et al. 1978).

Interest in the parameters of urban environments started to grow with the development of rural areas and the drive to save natural areas close to cities. Many excellent symposia on wildlife and trees in urban environments were held in the 1970s (Leedy 1979). Studies were directed toward collecting data on home ranges, species composition, and animal behavior in the urban setting. Leedy's (1979) comprehensive publication An Annotated Bibliography on Planning and Management for Urban-Suburban Wildlife inventoried many of the studies conducted during those years; less than 6% of the papers concerned animal damage.

Most rural urbanites and city dwellers are unprepared for chance encounters with native wildlife. They have no clear concept of wildlife needs, values, or problems. In the past, most of our problems with wildlife were linked with agricultural interests. While those concerns still exist, calls from urban areas (located between dense city structures and open farmland) are increasing significantly. A survey conducted by Don Harke (1981), State Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with county Extension Agents in North Carolina, indicated that 56% of the requests for information on wildlife problems were from urban clientele. A review of the wildlife phone log maintained in my office for a 30-month period shows that more than 50% of the calls concerning wildlife damage were from urban areas. These trends support the idea that in North Carolina, concern for wildlife damage in urban areas is significant. This is not surprising since North Carolina, although it is perceived to be a rural state, is the tenth most populous state in the nation. I suggest that these trends may be evident throughout the United States.

While many studies have been done on animal damage control (ADC), very little has filtered down or been modified for use in urban areas (D. Tylka, pers. com.). Often regulations on ADC were developed out of the need to prevent agricultural losses. Consequently, many of these solutions are not applicable to the urban environment.

When problems with urban wildlife occur, more often than not the frontier outlook prevails and for the lack of a better answer, the advice is to shoot the offending animal. In North Carolina, landowners have the right to protect their property. This type of advice frustrates many urban residents. Some do not understand how an agency charged with the protection of wildlife could have such a blatant disregard for it. The urbanite who has squirrels gnawing holes in the attic is upset because he cannot discharge a firearm in his community. The question becomes more serious when an urban area like Loudoun County, Virginia had 294 rabies cases in 1982. Their control program was hampered by inadequate information about urban wildlife populations (Dr. S. Jenkins, pers. com.). The lack of clear and specific regulations clouds the issue and frustrates everyone concerned with wildlife.

In many situations, answers to urban animal damage questions are not available. Homeowners who have attempted to provide a more natural and wooded setting around their homes are losing thousands of dollars a year in shrubs to pine voles (Wildlife Extension Telephone Records). While there has been much research on damage to orchards by pine voles, there is very little data on vole damage to yards. One cedar house on a street may be damaged repeatedly by

woodpeckers while others remain unscathed. Yet, no one seems to know why the birds pick a particular house, nor has anyone found an effective way to control the damage. Information is simply not available to help the people with these problems.

Work on wildlife damage control in urban areas is relatively new in our profession. In the past, most wildlife research was tied to game animals and wildlife depredation because that was where the funding link was secure. Much of our personal research interests were with remote field laboratories, popular species, and a desire to work with animals and their habitat rather than with residents and their urban environments.

Limited strides have been made in the area of urban animal damage control. The Wildlife Society's committees on Urban Wildlife and Animal Damage Control are good examples of professional commitment to these ideas. States such as Missouri and Colorado have created urban biologist positions. These individuals deal with all aspects of wildlife in an urban setting. However, all states must seek ways to dedicate a portion of their budgets and staffs to urban wildlife management.

Wildlife management courses for future professionals should include the problematic aspects of wildlife as well as the positive ones. Courses must include techniques for managing urban wildlife populations and for presenting wildlife information to a public that is becoming more urban. Otherwise, our growing electorate will continue to be misinformed and often misled about wildlife.

This idea of looking at all aspects of a wildlife issue is not new; Leopold (1949) stressed the point in the early days of our profession. In the area of urban wildlife, Flyger (1974), Howard (1974), DeGraaf and Thomas (1974), and others at the Symposium on wildlife in an Urbanizing Environment (Noyes and Progulske 1974) recognized the negative consequences of unmanaged wildlife populations in urban areas.

We as professionals have the responsibility to investigate and institute sound management practices in all wildlife habitats. If we do not take the leadership role, particularly in the area of urban wildlife damage control, that option may be lost. Many agricultural agencies are eagerly waiting to gain control of ADC programs. Some of these groups look at wildlife as a stumbling block in the way of food and fiber production. Will we, as wildlife professionals, be caught in a defensive posture and be left only to comment on the actions of others concerning this important aspect of wildlife management?

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