

Raccoon Fact Sheet

SPECIES DESCRIPTION

The raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is a stocky mammal up to three feet in length and weighing between 8-20 pounds. Distinctive markings include a black mask over the eyes and heavily furred tail with black rings. Its fur is grizzled in appearance and coloration can vary from gray to black, although individuals with a somewhat yellow, "tawny" color are common in some areas. Raccoons have pointy, triangular ears and hand-like front paws. Breeding peaks in February and March, but can occur at any time from December to June. Litters of 1-7 "kits" are born after about 63 days. Young are weaned after 10-12 weeks, but can remain with the female as a family unit for up to one year.

HABITS AND HABITAT

Raccoons are found throughout Georgia in rural, suburban, and urban landscapes. They are typically found in habitats closely associated with water, including coastal marshes, swamps, rivers, lakes and streams. They also tend to favor habitats where mature hardwood trees are available. Raccoons are highly adaptable and their populations thrive in most parts of the state. They typically den in hollow trees, ground burrows, or brush piles, but will readily use human structures like a barn, an attic, or an abandoned building. Denning raccoons with young can often be heard "chattering" in the den. Raccoons are active throughout the year in Georgia, but may remain in their dens during extreme winter weather. They are considered nocturnal, but will readily forage during the day when local conditions allow. Raccoons are omnivorous and opportunistic. They feed on a variety of plant and animal matter including berries, fruits, seeds, and insects, as well as other invertebrates and small vertebrates.

DISEASE

As with all wildlife, raccoons should not be approached or handled by humans. One reason for leaving raccoons undisturbed is their susceptibility to numerous diseases including canine distemper and parvovirus, in addition to zoonotic diseases (humans can get from animals) such as rabies and raccoon roundworms. Even though raccoons may be carriers of rabies, not all raccoons have rabies. Typically, rabid raccoons will exhibit aimless wandering and lack of coordination, or they will exhibit aggressive behavior that can include attacks and self-mutilation.

HEALTH CONCERNS

Nuisance raccoons cause health concerns for humans and their pets. Most diseases are transferred only through direct contact. Simply being near a raccoon is not considered a risk. Pets should receive regular vaccinations from your veterinarian to reduce risk. Report any direct contact with your pets to your county's animal control office. Any human contact with raccoons should be reported to the county health department. If you observe an obviously aggressive animal, report this to your regional WRD office.

NUISANCE

Because of their adaptability to different habitats and further development of formerly wild areas, raccoons often become a nuisance in urban and suburban areas, around rural homes and in recreation areas. One of the most common conflicts between raccoons and humans occurs when household pets are fed outside. Raccoons are attracted to pet foods and can often congregate in large numbers to take advantage of this easily obtained food source. Other raccoon / human conflicts occur when raccoons den in buildings, raid gardens, harass backyard chicken coops or visit garbage cans in search of food. Given raccoons' adaptability to different food sources and their dexterity, eliminating outside food sources can be challenging.

Raccoons are relatively easily captured in cage-style traps baited with moist cat food. However, due to the fact that raccoons can carry rabies and the fact that relocated raccoons often exhibit poor survival in new areas, relocating nuisance raccoons is not an option. Nuisance problems are best dealt with by changing or removing food sources, or excluding raccoons from human structures and garbage containers. Raccoons should never be fed intentionally. Relief of nuisance problems can be alleviated through contract with a WRD permitted nuisance trapper or with a permit for lethal control from a WRD Game Management Office.

FURBEARER VALUE

As with most furbearers, raccoon fur once was valuable to trappers and resulted in significant trapping pressure. Today their fur has little commercial value. However, they remain a popular game animal in the State of Georgia primarily for sport hunting. There are hunting and trapping seasons for raccoons, which occur from October through February.