

Please don't feed the wildlife!

They're not quite so appealing when they're up close and personal!
Provided by: Colorado Division of Wildlife

By **Donna Ralph**, Ellicott Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

One of the benefits of living in Colorado is our proximity to wildlife viewing. In Colorado you can see wildlife just about everywhere you look, including in your own back yard. You can see everything from hummingbirds to hawks, mallards to mountain lions.



The State of Colorado takes its wildlife and the protection of the wildlife very seriously. The Colorado Division of Wildlife is the State governing agency that oversees and manages our wildlife. The agency's concerns include keeping the wildlife healthy and keeping people safe.

Ellicott Wildlife Rehabilitation Center is a nonprofit agency that provides care to sick, injured, and orphaned native wildlife with the purpose of getting those animals healthy and back out to where they want to be and where they legally must be-back to nature.

And this is the time of year when the phone begins ringing from people having problems with their well-meaning but uninformed neighbors who are feeding the wildlife and causing problems for them.

One woman called because after several months of putting food out for squirrels she is now experiencing huge numbers of mice in her yard. She believes the mice are drawn not to all the food she's putting out but by her neighbor's patio furniture. Another woman called this morning because she was chased by raccoons the other night that were begging for food. People call when the neighborhood cats and dogs disappear due to mountain lions. People call when the neighborhood "pet" deer become hormonal and aggressive. People call because the bears are swiping bird feeders off their porches and destroying their property.

When all of this "nature" gets to be a problem people want something done and they want it done NOW. They demand these animals be removed. You know, this almost always ends badly for the animal, and the blame gets shifted directly to the agency or agencies that are left to handle this mess. It's not their fault; they're responding directly to an appeal from you to "do something about this." Whose fault is it, really?

There are times when wildlife needs a little help from humans. Putting up bird feeders and bird baths is a great way to help migratory birds, especially during winter and baby season, as well as during times of extreme drought. And feeding the birds is perfectly legal. However, I think we can agree that the bird feeders and the birds that visit them might attract other wildlife. If you live in bear country you really should bring those feeders in at night, particularly the

hummingbird feeders. Squirrels and mice will come to the feeders. Cottontails might come and eat seed scattered on the ground. Before you know it you could have raccoons and skunks coming, too, if not for seed then perhaps for dog food left outside and/or trash left out. After the coons come foxes or perhaps coyotes. Sooner or later the mountain lion might show up, especially if deer are being fed and drawn to a particular area, as deer are a food item for the mountain lion.

There is the problem of feeding wildlife inappropriate food. Not all critters can handle digesting corn. Moldy bread is healthy for nothing at all. Improper food can not only make wildlife sick, it can potentially make wildlife dead.

Animals congregating in one place to eat provide an arena for the spread of diseases, some of which can pose a big problem to humans and pets. I can't even tell you how many people call because the squirrels and raccoons are tearing up their patio furniture. Neighbors call me angry and upset because the deer are eating their landscaping because people are feeding them. Same goes for cottontails. People call when squirrels, mice, and other rodents are chewing up wires and upholstery in their cars. People call because they're concerned for their safety when the bears and mountain lions start peeking in their windows. While you're out there feeding the wildlife, your neighbor might be calling and asking to have it removed.

Also keep in mind the fines for feeding wildlife; \$68 for the first offense of feeding bears, mountain lions, deer, fox, and coyote; and then \$100, \$500, and \$1000 for repeat offenses.

Please understand that for every action there is a reaction. We all love and appreciate our wildlife but we need to look at the big picture to understand how something as benign and seemingly helpful as putting out bird food can cause a big problem for wildlife, neighbors, people and pets, and wildlife agencies. Feeding birds is great and helpful. A few critters might enjoy the feeder as well. But deliberately placing large amounts of food outside in an attempt to draw other wildlife creates a problem. Feeding small critters eventually attracts the bigger predatory critters. Nobody wants these animals euthanized. Nobody wants people, animals, and property damaged. Here are some things we can do to help the wildlife in our yard:

- Cover the chimneys after the season and cover window wells NOW, before someone builds a nest in there.
- Check window wells frequently; many of our calls regard trapped babies.
- Keep bird feeders and birdbaths scrupulously clean.
- No red dye in the hummingbird feeders!! Hang outside April 15th; keep up until Thanksgiving for stragglers.
- Bring bird feeders in at night, including hummingbird feeders in bear country.
- Bring pet food in at night.
- Cloth shopping bags instead of plastic. Some retailers offer credit for reusing plastic bags and/or for using cloth bags.
- Xeriscape and landscape with wildlife habitat in mind. Consider native and drought-tolerant plants.
- Environmental-friendly fertilizers.
- Environmentally safe alternatives to pesticides.

- Environmental-friendly cleaning and personal care products.
- Eco-friendly antifreeze/coolant in the vehicles.
- Place bird feeders within 3 feet of windows to prevent birds hitting windows.
- Put trash out on trash day. Keep trash and pet food in tightly covered containers.
- We're not fans of sticky glue traps, after having peeled hummingbirds and others off. These traps usually result in a slow, painful death and oftentimes, even after removing the animals, the damage is usually fatal.
- If possible, don't cut or remove trees and shrubbery until after baby season.
- Bring the cat and dog in for a few days during fledgling season.
- Leave the fawns alone. If they need help, they'll be walking and bleating.
- Put baby birds back in the nest, or build a simple replacement nest and hang it in the shade close to where found. The parents are probably watching and will resume care if the baby is not damaged.
- Remember, it is against the law to possess wildlife unless you have a special license from the Colorado Division of Wildlife and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Help us to help the animals you find by donating time, cash, wildlife rehab supplies.
- Recycle.
- Hang bird and bat nest boxes.
- Cut the plastic 6-pack rings before placing in trash so nobody gets caught in it.
- No lead sinkers for fishing.
- Barb-less hooks.
- Smooth wire instead of barbed wire for agriculture.

www.ellicottwildlife.com

P.O. Box 75069

Colorado Springs, Co. 80970

719-683-8152