

# On the wild side

From the odd screeches and yowls that wake us up at night to our gardens munched by deer, human/wildlife conflicts are not



*Beaver ponds provide habitat for wood ducks, green herons and belted kingfishers, as well as stormwater benefits and water quality protection.*

infrequent in Fairfax County. These conflicts range from mildly annoying to downright destructive, like beaver dams that send water spilling over pond banks or squirrels in the attic and chimney. And unfortunately there is no simple or easy solution.

Why not just trap and relocate the nuisance beast? Besides being against state game regulations, animal relocations are rarely successful - either the animal returns to the conflict area, the animal creates conflict in the new area, or the animal is so stressed by the process that it does not survive. In addition, if the habitat where the nuisance animal lived in the first place is still high quality, other animals of the same species may move in.

Wildlife has not had an easy history in Fairfax County. Harvesting of wildlife for food and fur contributed to the severe decline in most of our major wildlife populations. The year 1911 was a low point in wildlife diversity in Virginia - beaver, elk, bison and the Carolina parakeet had all been exterminated. Only the beaver has returned with the help of reintroduction programs. Common species today, like the white-tailed deer and Canada goose, were also rare in the early 20th century.

## Beneficial Neighbors

From the first glimpse of a robin in spring to the sight of a painted turtle on a log in a stream, the intangible benefits of wildlife are endless and usually outweigh the more concrete ecosystem benefits of pollination (provided by mosquitoes), population management of pests (provided by fox and coyote), seed dispersal (provided by birds) and the like.



## Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor's 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship)



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# Fairfax County Stewardship



Photo © by John White

# Wildlife Conflict



*Deer may be one of the most beloved of wild animals. However, their destructive eating habits contribute to a growing herd size that exceeds the carrying capacity of the land.*

## It is Good to Have a Plan

An animal that has become a nuisance is an animal that has a problem. The Fairfax County Park Authority has a four-step plan for working to minimize conflict between humans and wildlife. This process is

outlined in "Policy 202: Wildlife Conflict Resolution," available on the Park Authority's website, [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks) (see Policy Manual). The policy recognizes the need for wildlife and its benefit to park quality, operations and services.

### Step 1:

**Tolerance** is an amazing and generous choice. It works with the animal's life cycle to recognize that most nuisance behaviors are seasonal. For example, when the kits move out of the fox den, the ear-piercing noises will stop; you only have to wait about a month. Tolerance allows the wildlife to behave naturally, without stress. Leaving the nuisance animal alone usually results in better health, reproduction and survivorship for both young animals and adults.

### Step 2:

Sometimes the problem isn't the noise of a woodpecker drumming or the temporary inconvenience of not being able to enter the backyard while the red shouldered hawk is nesting. Sometimes the



*Pileated woodpeckers don't eat wood, but rather the bugs that infest wood, such as carpenter ants and termites.*

*The continued existence of wildlife and wilderness is important to the quality of life of humans.*

Jim Fowler, Naturalist, Wild Kingdom

problem is too much wildlife. Residents are responsible for taking reasonable steps to **exclude** unwanted wildlife from their property. This could be building a tall fence to deter deer, wrapping trees with hardware cloth to protect against beaver, eliminating potential food sources such as pet bowls, salt licks and trash that attract animals, or covering a woodpecker's favorite drumming spot on the house with foam rubber.



*The suburban landscape is ideal for species like the Canada goose.*

### Step 3:

**Harassment**, like exclusion, is based on the principle that if we make the area unwelcoming to wildlife they will move on by themselves. Harassment techniques can range from physical and chemical deterrents to noise. Specially trained dogs, for instance, can be used to chase Canada geese away from lakes and ponds without harming the geese. Beaver dams can be removed, and woodchuck burrows can be filled. Many of these techniques require permission of the land owner or a special permit, but harassment is a non-lethal option.

### Step 4:

When the tolerance, exclusion and harassment fail to successfully remove the nuisance, **population control** is an option. Population control is any technique that works to reduce the number of wild animals, including birth control, relocation

and euthanization. Population control always requires a local, state and/or federal permit.

## If not you, who? Simple things.

◆ **Avoid animal attractions.** Protect your pet and the wild animals of the

county by keeping pets on a leash and out of natural areas. Food left out for your pet may also attract wild animals, so please do not leave food out for pets when you are not there to observe their eating and always pick up any left over food.

## If not you, who? Big things.

◆ **Volunteer to protect trees from beaver.** In Fairfax County, approximately one in every five wildlife complaints is associated with beaver. The best way to discourage beaver is to wrap trees in hardware cloth. Beaver provide many free benefits to the ecosystem, from water quality to wildlife diversity, but only if they can coexist with humankind. By assisting streamside landowners in protecting landscaping from beaver damage, you advance the spirit of coexistence while preserving natural resources.

- ◆ Park Authority regulations prohibit the feeding, harassment, detention, removal or interference with wildlife in parks.
- ◆ Federal, State and Park Authority regulations prohibit the release or relocation of wildlife onto park property.



*The red fox is quite visible in the spring, teaching its kits to hunt and survive. The fox's favorite food? Mice and rats. Yum.*