

# NEW YORK STATE Conservationist



Wildlife is **EVERYWHERE**



Welcome  
to

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

for  
Kids!

## In this issue:

We enjoy seeing  
wildlife, but  
sometimes it's  
nearer than we  
expect. How will  
you live in  
harmony with your  
wild neighbors?

Mule deer in the western U.S. are found near human development, as are New York's white-tailed deer.

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Return a Gift to Wildlife. Donations to this program  
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[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/327.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/327.html) for more information.

Cover photo Gerry Lemmo





DEC/Scott Smith

# Wildlife is everywhere.

## Animals are found wherever there is suitable habitat.

Some species have adapted to live near people and may be seen where they were once unfamiliar visitors. Many—such as bobcat, fisher, owls and coyotes—are nocturnal (active mostly at night) or secretive and are noticed only by careful observers or by their tracks or other signs.



David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org

## Habitat = Home

The area in which an animal normally lives is called its habitat. In their habitat, they find food, water, shelter and enough space to live. Good habitat for one kind of animal may be poor habitat for others. (e.g., Deer don't live in the ocean, and whales aren't found in the forest.)



Jim Clayton



Erica Szlosek, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Knowing what kinds of habitat different species prefer helps us to enjoy wildlife. If we want to see wildlife, we can visit their habitat and watch for them. Lots of people like to watch birds, so it's helpful to know which are found in grasslands, which prefer forests, and which we may see in backyards or on school grounds.



Mona Bearor, Southern Adirondack Audubon

Knowing what kinds of habitat different species prefer helps us manage wildlife. By making changes to habitat, we can encourage wildlife to live in places where we'd like to have them. We can also discourage wildlife by making changes. If a habitat doesn't meet their needs, they will leave.



# There's something exciting about seeing wild animals, whether we go looking for them... or encounter them unexpectedly.



Watching wildlife and taking photos can be enjoyed and shared with others your whole life long. Insects are fun to photograph—there are so many of them!

If you have a flower garden, you can plant it with wildlife in mind and create habitat for them in your yard or on school grounds. Gardens that attract butterflies, frogs and toads are fun.



Frank Herec



Frank Herec

New Yorkers, young and old, help with important wildlife research. **"Citizen scientists"** gather information and record and report it for many different kinds of studies. They contribute to DEC research about game birds, frogs, toads and furbearers (e.g., rabbits, raccoons, bobcats, American marten). Some citizen scientists are also hunters and anglers who spend a great deal of time outdoors observing wildlife.

**Sometimes wildlife cause problems for people. Animals may be in inconvenient places, such as near homes, schools, farms, and airports. Sometimes their search for food and shelter results in damage to property or crops.**

Having wild neighbors can be a treat, but not when they make a mess or destroy property.



USDA Forest Service, SRS Archive, Bugwood.org

**Sometimes animals seem to be in trouble and in need of our help, but they aren't.**

**Leave baby animals alone.** Often the parent is close by looking for food and will return shortly. It will not return until you're gone. Learn more at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6956.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6956.html), "If you care...leave them there."

If a wild animal appears to be ill or injured, do **NOT** approach it. If you have questions about what to do, call your local DEC office.



# Do you know the answers to these important questions?

Turn the page for some ideas!



Russ Ottens, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

Do wild animals make good pets?



Paul Bolstad, University of Minnesota, Bugwood.org

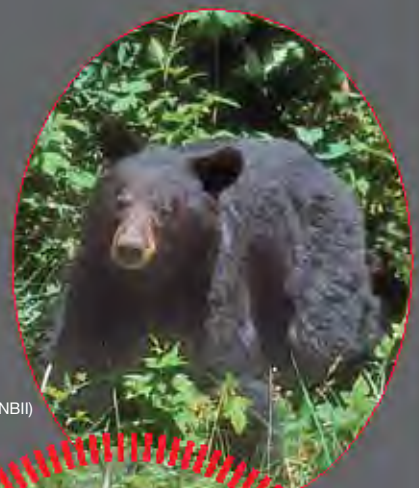


How can owners keep their pets safe from wildlife?  
(Note porcupine quills in dog's nose.)



Jim Clayton

Is it okay to feed wildlife?



John Mosseso (NBII)





# Coexisting with Wildlife

*To coexist is to live in harmony with each other.*

We can coexist with wildlife and avoid conflicts by learning about the animals that live near our homes. When we understand their needs, we can avoid creating situations where people and wildlife are in conflict with each other.

## Keep pets safe from wildlife, and keep wildlife safe from pets.

The best way to keep pets safe from wildlife, and to keep wildlife safe from pets, is to know what kinds of wildlife are around and to keep pets under control. Dogs that encounter porcupines sometimes find themselves with a painful mouthful of quills—not to mention the effects on the porcupine! If skunks feel threatened, they may defend themselves by spraying a strong-smelling oily substance to fend off danger. This leaves both dog and owner with a stinky reminder to stay away.



Keep pets leashed, fenced or indoors.



There are more than 60 million pet cats in the United States. Studies have shown that housecats that roam outdoors are responsible for killing all kinds of small animals, including birds, mice and even salamanders. Nationwide, pet and feral cats kill hundreds of millions of animals each year.

### For more information:

[www.dec.ny.gov/23.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/23.html) DEC's Animals, Plants, Aquatic Life

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/261.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/261.html) DEC's Wildlife Health

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html) DEC's Nuisance Species - Handling Problems with Wildlife

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/74763.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/74763.html) DEC's Feeding Wildlife - A Wrong Choice

[www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html) American Bird Conservancy's "Cats Indoors" webpage

[www.defenders.org/living-wildlife/living-wildlife-101](http://www.defenders.org/living-wildlife/living-wildlife-101) Defenders of Wildlife - Living with Wildlife 101

[www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/feed\\_wildlife.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/feed_wildlife.html) Humane Society of the United States, "Four Reasons Not to Feed Wild Animals"

<http://tv.hww.ca/video/watch/2> Canadian Wildlife Federation's Hinterland Who's Who "Living with Urban Wildlife" webisode

*Kids' Easy-to-Create Wildlife Habitats* by Emily Stetson (Williamson Books, Nashville, TN, 2004)

*New York State Watchable Wildlife Guide* by Watchable Wildlife, Inc. (Adventure Publications, Inc., Cambridge, MA, 2012)

*Watching Nature: A Beginner's Field Guide* by Monica Russo (Sterling Publishing Co., New York, 1998)

# Wild animals are not pets.

It is illegal to keep wildlife as pets in New York State. When a wild animal is removed from its habitat and kept as a pet, it is no longer able to breed and contribute to the survival of its species. Wildlife belong in the wild where they contribute to biodiversity (variety of life). Many species of wildlife are difficult to care for and most do not make good pets. Pets, especially non-native species, must *never* be released in the wild.

Under certain circumstances, licensed wildlife rehabilitators may keep wild animals. These animals are not pets, however. Most often, they have been injured and will be released back into the wild when they are well enough to survive on their own. If they cannot survive on their own, they may be used for educational purposes, such as visits to schools.



Sue Strafer

## Keep wild animals wild.



Sometimes we do everything we can to avoid problems with wildlife, and it's still not enough. That's when it's time to contact DEC. Go to [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html) for detailed information.



Wild animals that learn to approach one house will approach other houses and can become nuisances. They may be attracted to homes if they find a food source nearby. You can avoid problems from the start by storing trash securely and feeding pets indoors only. Pet food and unsecured garbage cans are attractive to bears, raccoons and skunks. To discourage problems with bears, feed birds only in winter, and take birdfeeders down around March when bears' hibernation period ends. A diet scrounged from humans is not healthy for wildlife. *It is illegal to intentionally feed bears, deer and moose in New York State.*

If you want to help wildlife, get involved in projects to improve your favorite species' natural habitat, like putting up bird houses, planting a butterfly garden, or cleaning up litter.



## Become a Wildlife Detective



Take a walk in your yard, neighborhood or a nearby park and look for signs that wildlife has been there. Animal tracks are a sure sign of activity. Watch for scat (poop), too. Can you find places where animals have been eating or taking shelter from the weather? Record your findings in a journal. Include written descriptions, drawings, and photos. Go to [www.dec.ny.gov/education/40310.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/40310.html) to read the "Become a Winter Wildlife Detective!" issue of *Conservationist for Kids* for more ideas and a key to common animal tracks.

## Plan a wildlife-friendly garden for your home or school during the colder months, and then plant it in the spring.

Consider what kinds of wildlife you'd like to attract and what kinds you don't want. Think about how the garden will provide food, water, shelter and places for your wildlife of choice to hide. You can include houses for birds, bats and toads, puddles for butterflies and more. The National Wildlife Federation has guidelines at [www.nwf.org/How-to-Help/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx](http://www.nwf.org/How-to-Help/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx) to help design your garden.

## Create Wildlife Habitat

Whether you live in the city or in the country, you can create habitat for wildlife. If you live in an apartment, use a window feeder to provide food for birds. If you have a yard, place a birdfeeder away from the building but near enough to enjoy watching birds from indoors. Clean and disinfect bird feeders regularly to control mold and parasites, and so diseases aren't spread. Be sure to take your feeders down in March to avoid attracting bears.



## Watchable Wildlife and Citizen Science

What is your favorite kind of wild animal found in New York State? Do you like birds best? Or do you like mammals, reptiles or amphibians? Maybe it's insects. Researchers observe wildlife to learn more about their needs and how to help them. You can help researchers by becoming a citizen scientist. You'll have fun, learn a lot along the way, and help your favorite creatures. See "Discover Citizen Science" at [www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/78429.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/78429.html) for a list of projects covering everything from birds to ladybugs.

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## Conservationist for Kids

### Supplement for Classroom Teachers – Wildlife is Everywhere

#### Coexisting with Wildlife

Wildlife is all around us. Birds and squirrels are easy for urban dwellers to spot, but our cities and suburbs play host to other wildlife too—deer, coyote and raccoons, to name a few. Suburban and rural residents are accustomed to wildlife, large and small. We see stories in our local newspapers about bears and deer in urban and suburban neighborhoods, and problems with wildlife were covered in a story in the December 9, 2013 issue of *Time* magazine (see “Resources” on next page). As human populations expand, our communities encroach on wildlife habitat. Interactions with wild animals are bound to occur. Whether the interactions are positive or negative often depends on us.

We can manage our interactions with wildlife by understanding what makes one habitat more attractive than another for different species. We also can ensure we don’t unwittingly “invite” wildlife to cause problems for us, or that we don’t cause problems for wildlife through our actions. This issue of *Conservationist for Kids* looks at our interactions with wildlife and how to make them positive. There are many opportunities for discussion in classrooms, from how to enhance habitat for the wildlife we want nearby (e.g., birds at the birdfeeder) to how we can discourage unwanted wildlife (e.g., removing trash to avoid problems with raccoons and skunks).

#### This Issue’s “Outside Page”

There are plenty of ways to live in harmony with wildlife. A few of them are described on the Outside Page (page 8) of this issue of *Conservationist for Kids*. Start by having your students learn about the wildlife around their neighborhoods. It’s as simple as going for a walk and keeping a record of what they observe. Then, have them use their observations for citizen science projects, including Project FeederWatch at <http://feederwatch.org> and the Lost Ladybug Project at [www.lostladybug.org](http://www.lostladybug.org).

#### Teacher Workshops

For teachers who have participated in a Project WILD or Project Learning Tree workshop, the activities listed below complement the winter 2014 issue of *Conservationist for Kids*. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html) for information about workshops and how to obtain curriculum and activity guides.

**Project WILD:** And the Wolf Wore Shoes  
First Impressions  
What’s Wild?

**Project Learning Tree:** Habitat Pen Pals  
Did You Notice?  
Schoolyard Safari

***Conservationist for Kids* and an accompanying teacher supplement are distributed to public school fourth-grade classes three times each school year (fall, winter and spring).** If you would like to be added to or removed from the distribution list, if your contact information needs to be changed, or if you have questions or comments, please e-mail the editor at [cforkids@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:cforkids@gw.dec.state.ny.us) or call 518-402-8047.

**Limited quantities of back issues of *Conservationist for Kids* magazine are available upon request.** Go to [www.dec.ny.gov/education/40248.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/40248.html) to preview them online before requesting printed copies. From each issue’s lead page, click on the link “read the entire issue, cover to cover” to access an eight-page PDF of the print version. To request printed copies (individual or bulk), e-mail the editor at [cforkids@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:cforkids@gw.dec.state.ny.us) or call 518-402-8047.



# Supplemental Activities for the Classroom

## Schoolyard Habitat

As a class, explore your schoolyard or a nearby park or green space for animals or signs of animals. Make a list of animals the class sees and a separate list of animals not seen but for which there is evidence (such as tracks, scat and food scraps). Are there animals the students did not expect to find in their schoolyard but saw or found signs of? Are there animals they expected to find but did not? Ask your students to consider why one kind of animal might be present but not another. What kinds of animals would they like to see in their schoolyard? Does the schoolyard habitat provide for all the needs of these animals? If not, what's missing? How could students improve the schoolyard habitat for wildlife?

## Wild Animal Posters

Have your students make posters with the theme "Keep Wild Animals Wild." Use the questions and answers on pages 5 and 6 of this issue of *Conservationist for Kids* as inspiration, but don't stop there. Have students think of other ways people might play a part in keeping wild animals wild, such as improving habitat, avoiding conflicts, et cetera. Display the posters for National Wildlife Week, the third week of March.

## Pet Profile/Wild Cousins

Owning a pet is fun, but it's also a lot of responsibility. Have your students make three- to five-minute oral presentations to the class about their pets and how they care for them. Have them compare their pets to wild animals that are similar. If a student doesn't have a pet, ask him or her to speak about an animal they'd like to have as a pet. **Students should be reminded that it is never a good idea to own a wild animal as a pet, and in many instances, it is illegal!** Some questions to answer are below.

### My Pet

- What kind of animal is your pet? Where did it come from (e.g., pet store, animal shelter)?
- What does your pet eat?
- Does your pet require special habitat (e.g., fish tank, warming rock or lamp)?
- How do you keep your pet safe, healthy and happy?

### My Pet's Wild Cousin

- What kind of wild animal is similar to your pet (e.g., dogs are in the same family as foxes, coyotes and wolves; cats are in the same family as lynx and mountain lions)?
- What does this animal require for habitat (food, water, shelter, space)?
- How does this animal stay safe?

## Do you have an interactive white board in your classroom?

If you use a SMART Board or similar interactive white board or projection system in your classroom, consider downloading a PDF of *Conservationist for Kids* and using it along with the printed copies enclosed in this mailing. This issue and all of our back issues are available at [www.dec.ny.gov/education/40248.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/40248.html).

## Online Resources and Books

[www.dec.ny.gov/23.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/23.html) DEC's Animals, Plants, Aquatic Life

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/261.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/261.html) DEC's Wildlife Health

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7005.html) DEC's Nuisance Species - Handling Problems with Wildlife

[www.humanesociety.org/animals/wild\\_neighbors/](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/wild_neighbors/) Humane Society of the United States, "Wild Neighbors"

[www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/feed\\_wildlife.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/feed_wildlife.html) Humane Society of the United States, "Four Reasons Not to Feed Wild Animals"

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/eeek/critter/wildanimals.htm> Wisconsin DEK, "Leave Wild Animals in the Wild"

<http://tv.hww.ca/video/watch/2> Canadian Wildlife Federation, "I Smell Trouble: Living with Urban Wildlife" webisode

[www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/FW/2ColumnSubPage/STEL02\\_168419.html](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/FW/2ColumnSubPage/STEL02_168419.html) Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Living with Wildlife

[www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html) American Bird Conservancy, "Indoor Cats"

"America's Pest Problem: It's Time to Cull the Herd" by David Von Drehle, *Time Magazine*, Dec. 9, 2013, pp. 36-43; online at

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2158676,00.html>

*City Critters: Wildlife in the Urban Jungle* by Nicholas Read (Orca Book Publishers, Custer, WA, 2012)

*Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City* by Janet Schulman (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2008)

*Zoobooks: City Animals*, written by Marjorie Betts Shaw (Wildlife Education, Ltd., San Diego, CA, 2004)