

10 Nuisance Wildlife Resource Kit for Nova Scotia Farmers

As Nova Scotia's human population increases, clashes between humans and wildlife are inevitable. Some wildlife species can cause serious economic damage to farms. You should plan to deal with these species when establishing your farm rather than waiting until damage has occurred. Prevention is the key to living with wildlife.

The Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources has a series of informative fact sheets on a number of wildlife species that can become a nuisance to farmers and homeowners. For more information visit: www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/living-with-wildlife/

Coyotes

Coyotes primarily cause problems for sheep farmers. However, they may also prey on fowl and newborn calves. Nova Scotia sheep farmers have developed a number of successful strategies for preventing coyote predation. Electric fencing has shown the most consistency in protecting sheep. Other methods include the use of guard animals and confining sheep at night. Coyotes may be harvested year round with the purchase of a wildlife habitat stamp from the Department of Natural Resources. However, this is not a sustainable solution to a coyote predation problem and other prevention methods should be adopted first.

Deer

Deer can cause serious damage to home gardens, commercial vegetable fields, berries, and orchards. The most effective control strategy used by farmers and gardeners is a deer-proof fence at least 8 feet high. Other methods include deterrents such as repellents and scare devices. After all other avenues have been exhausted, a permit may be issued from the Department of Natural Resources to remove nuisance animals by lethal means.

Bears

Bears can be a serious pest to agricultural land owners, especially to honey producers and in wild blueberry fields. Electric fencing has been proven to be an effective means of bear control. In addition, honey producers have

experienced some success in stacking and securing their beehives. Nuisance bears cannot be trapped or killed without a special permit from the Department of Natural Resources. However, general hunting licences are available during bear hunting season.

Raccoons

Raccoons are notorious for damaging sweet corn. They will steal eggs and can kill poultry and ducks by reaching through wire mesh. A Nuisance Wildlife Operator can be hired to remove problem raccoons. However, prevention is a more effective control strategy. In poultry barns, damage can normally be eliminated by covering openings such as doors and windows with a wire mesh fence with an outward overhang.

Skunks

Skunks are generally beneficial to farmers because they eat insects and rodents, but they can dig up fields in search of grubs, disturb beehives, and attack poultry. However, even in cases when they do become pests, skunks are usually easy to control by blocking access to poultry houses, raising the height of beehives, and fencing gardens. If skunk damage in a large field becomes excessive, this can be addressed by eliminating the insect the skunk is eating with an insecticide or other control measure.

Beavers

Beavers can be a beneficial animal to forest managers but they can also build dams that cause farmlands to flood. It is the landowner's responsibility to prevent damage caused by beaver. Disturbing a beaver dam/lodge or killing a beaver can only be done with a permit from the Department of Natural Resources. If the land owner is content to have beavers on their property, water level control pipes and culvert guards and protectors can be used to control flooding.

Eagles and Hawks

These birds sometimes prey on free-range chickens. Keeping roosters, turkeys or guinea fowl with the hens can deter these and other predators. In addition, penning the chickens at night and covering their range area with netting can prevent this type of predation. Eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls are protected birds. It is illegal to kill them for any reason.

Other Wildlife

Other types of wildlife may predate on farm livestock, including mink, weasels, fishers, bobcats and foxes. Assume that you are not permitted to trap or kill any wildlife until you consult with staff of the Department of Natural Resources. The Wildlife Act (www.gov.ns.ca/just/regulations/regs/wigeneral.htm) lists only 11 groups of species that can be killed throughout the year for the purpose of preventing damage to property. This includes coyotes, woodchuck, skunk, porcupine, crows and other bird species, rats and mice, red squirrels and chipmunks. The prevention and deterrence techniques described in the sections above are effective against most other wildlife species and should be tried first before trapping or killing.

To consult staff of the Department of Natural Resources on nuisance wildlife, see the Department's online staff directory:

www.gov.ns.ca/natr/thedepartment/offices.asp

Stray Dogs and Cats

Farmers sometimes suspect wild animals of killing their livestock when the real culprit is a neighbourhood dog or cat. One indicator that the problem may be dogs is that the livestock are killed but not eaten. If you suspect your neighbour's pets, talk with your neighbour about the problem and/or contact your Municipal Animal Control Officer. If you suspect stray cats and dogs, contact your Municipal Animal Control Officer.

The Department of Agriculture has a [Wildlife Compensation Program](#) to compensate farmers for livestock deaths and crop damage caused by certain species of wildlife. This program is intended to help cushion farmers temporarily while they implement long-term prevention strategies.

Prevention and deterrence are usually effective in reducing economic losses due to Nova Scotia wildlife, but ultimately you may have to accept a certain degree of wildlife predation and incorporate this into your production costs.

[Written by Rebecca Sooksom, New Entrant Resource Coordinator, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Sarah Spencer, Wildlife Technician, Department of Natural Resources. Some of the information in this fact sheet was condensed from information posted on the Department of Natural Resources website: www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/living-with-wildlife. May 2010.]