



# Raccoons

*(Procyon lotor)*

Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

## Getting to Know Raccoons

Raccoons are highly adaptable. They prefer forest habitats but have adjusted to a variety of environments, including urban and suburban areas where they thrive in close association with humans.

Though nocturnal, raccoons are sometimes active during the day. Raccoons are omnivorous. They eat fruit, vegetables, nuts, insects, and small animals, including crayfish, crabs, frogs, and fish. Raccoons do not hibernate, but they do live off stored body fat when food is scarce during the winter. Raccoons make dens in hollow trees, rock crevices, or burrows dug by other animals and in storm sewers, crawl spaces, chimneys, and attics.

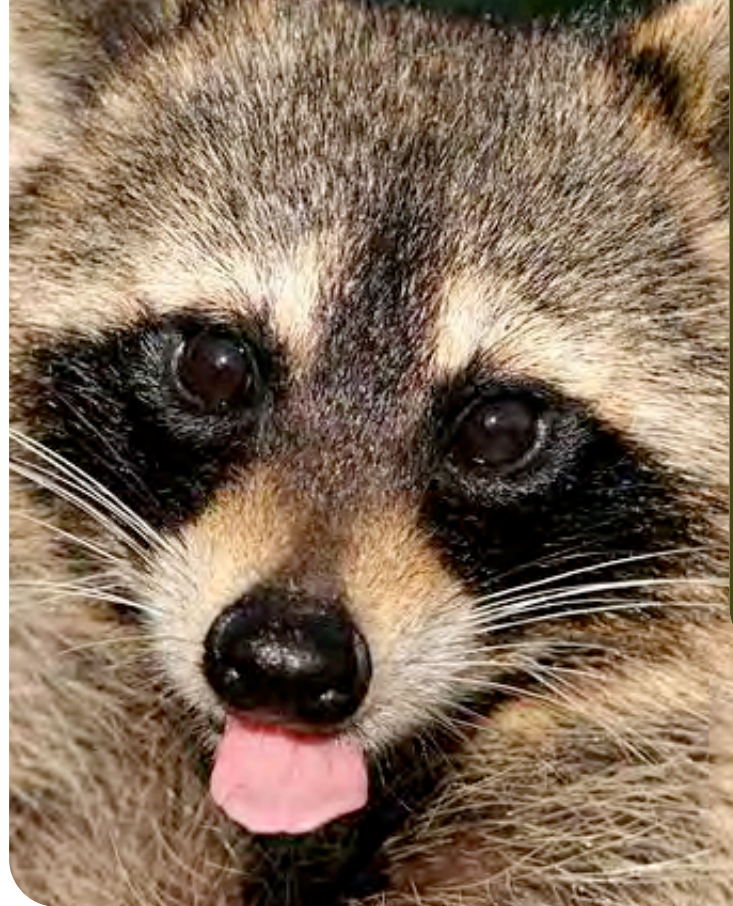
Except during extreme weather or when a mother is denning with her young, raccoons do not occupy a den for more than one or two days. Females that are disturbed will often move their young to new dens.

Male raccoons have overlapping home ranges. Unrelated raccoons tend to avoid each other, but several may share a communal den during winter storms. Breeding season extends from late winter through early spring, with females generally giving birth between April and June to an average litter of three or four young. They remain in their birth den until they are about seven weeks old; then, their mother moves them to a series of alternate dens. In some parts of the country, young raccoons spend their first winter with their mothers; in other parts of the country, families disperse in the fall.

Once habituated to people, raccoons can become bold and their presence, especially in large numbers, can pose problems for home and landowners. The most effective way to deal with raccoons is to modify their habitat so that they will not be attracted to human-provided sources of food and shelter.

### Here are some ideas:

- **Never feed them** - Dispose of food scraps and trash in a metal can, and make sure the lid fits tightly. Secure the lid with rope or a chain.
- **Avoid leaving pet food outdoors** - If you cannot avoid feeding dogs or cats outdoors, pick up food and water bowls, as well as leftovers and spilled food, well before dusk. Never leave food outside at night.
- **Lock pet doors** - Lock pet doors at night and do not leave pet food near the opening. If a raccoon does venture inside, remain calm, close surrounding interior doors, leave the room, and allow the animal to find its way out.
- **Use bright lights or make noise** - Raccoons sometimes raid gardens to eat fruits and vegetables, particularly crops such as grapes and corn. You may be able to deter them until crops are ready to be harvested by using bright lights, especially those activated by motion, or by making noise when the animals are present.
- **Cap chimney openings** - Raccoons sometimes find shelter in uncapped chimneys. Prevent potential problems by capping all chimney openings. If you suspect raccoons are present, do not try to smoke them out.



## About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:

[www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center](http://www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center)

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.



Raccoons may also seek shelter under porches, in crawl spaces, or in attics where they can enter through boards or large holes. From early spring through summer, assume there are young, and wait until they are old enough for their mother to move them before you attempt to exclude them. When you are sure no young are present, you can prevent them from returning by installing bright, flashing lights and turning on a radio.

After the animals leave, tack a sheet of plastic over the entry. Be sure to leave the light and radio on until there is no sign of activity and then seal the entry.

Overflowing, uncovered, or easily accessible garbage cans provide an open invitation for hungry raccoons.



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Dan Benson, *County Executive*

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is owned by Mercer County and operated by the Mercer County Park Commission with the support and assistance of Wildlife Center Friends.

Wildlife Center Friends is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization formed to support the activities of the Mercer County Wildlife Center. • [www.wildlifecenterfriends.org](http://www.wildlifecenterfriends.org)