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Life

How Torontonians can co-exist with their furry neighbours, even raccoons

We defend them and deride them in equal measure. Here's what the city's doing to minimize wildlife conflict.

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VIEW 2 PHOTOS

CARLOS OSORIO / TORONTO STAR [Order this photo](#)

Raccoon as Godzilla? A mural on Portland St. south of Queen St. W. is emblematic of our complicated relationship with the critters.

By: **Isabel Teotonio** Living reporter, Published on Fri Oct 16 2015

Toronto's relationship with its wildlife is complicated.

We curse the smug raccoon plucking meat off leftover chicken wings like a Roman god in the bottom of our green bins one day, and the next **build a vigil** when he meets his demise in our traffic. We turn him into memes, paint murals depicting him like Godzilla and collectively shun anyone treating him too harshly. (A shovel? No.) And then we curse him again as the little hedonist brings his friends and rip open every garbage bag on the street, scattering tissues and chip bags everywhere.

We think squirrels are cute, get twitterpated over baby skunks and a fox sighting may be more coveted than Drake on Instagram. Then we curse them all as they scratch our walls, spray our dogs and dig up our flower beds.

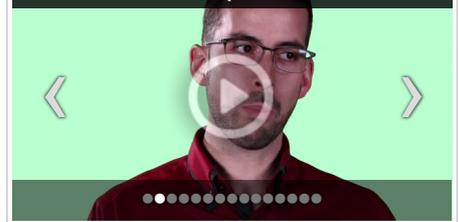
Clashes between Toronto's human and wild residents have long existed, but lately it seems as if the critters are getting more numerous. With climate change moving animals toward us, and urban sprawl us towards them, experts suggest the best thing we can do is learn to get along.

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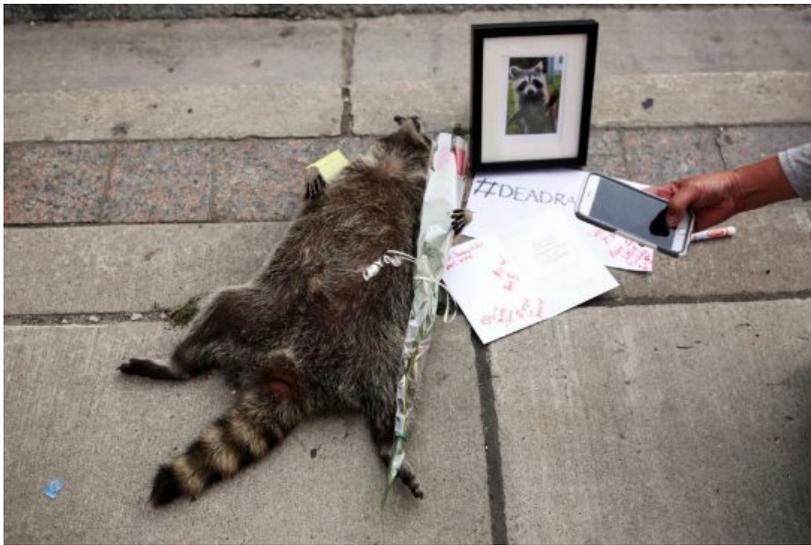
Rob Ford says cancer may be back



Jays no longer 'the right fit for me,' GM Alex Anthopoulos says



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COLE BURSTON

Passerbys take photos of a memorial at the corner of Church and Yonge Sts. for a dead raccoon this past July.

The science

The city has no official critter count. And the most recent data, for raccoons, dates back to the 1980s and suggests there are between seven and 12 per square kilometre, and [as many as 100 in some areas](#).

“Anecdotally, it makes sense that wild populations probably are growing, just because the human populations in the city are growing,” says Mary Lou Leiher, program manager of Toronto Animal Services, which responds to calls about sick, injured or distressed animals but not wildlife conflict. “As we get more numerous we’re providing them with more shelter and food.”

When Brad Gates started his wildlife removal business 31 years ago, the average litter size of raccoons, squirrels and skunks was three or four. Today it’s six and seven, says the founder of AAA Gates’ Wildlife Control. When it comes to raccoons, he suspects the city is “unique.”

“I’ve often heard of Toronto being referred to as the [Raccoon capital of North America](#),” he says, adding the number of wildlife removal companies in other cities pale by comparison.

The introduction of the green bin program, he says, has allowed them to breed at a faster rate.



MELISSA RENMICK/ TORONTO STAR

Mayor John Tory unveiled the new supposedly raccoon-proof bins at city hall on April 9, 2015.

The city’s plan

The days of feasting at the bin may be numbered. In April, Mayor John Tory announced that in the city’s “fight against the Raccoon Nation” the bins will be

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Back to School

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replaced, beginning next spring, with ones that are “raccoon-proof.”

And this fall a new working group at city hall is starting work on a citywide strategy for mitigating negative interactions between humans and wildlife.

The Inter-Divisional Working Group on Urban Wildlife will consider emerging practices in wildlife management, increasing public awareness about conflict prevention and amending bylaws, such as banning the feeding of wildlife on private property and of pigeons in public spaces. According to city staff report, getting humans to change their behaviour is a more cost-effective and long-term solution than implementing culls or sterilization programs.

“Wildlife conflict has always been an issue,” says Leiber, who is part of the working group, which is expected to report back to Licensing and Standards Committee in mid-to-late 2016. “Now we’re just ramping up those (public education) efforts.”

Nathalie Karvonen, executive director of the Toronto Wildlife Centre, a charitable wildlife rescue organization, welcomes the group’s creation. Often, when people get frustrated or angry with wildlife it’s not the animal’s fault, she says. Instead, the problem can usually be resolved with a pretty easy change in human behaviour.

Karvonen suspects some solutions the group comes up with will be unpopular with some. Possible solutions, she says, could include keeping cats indoors, locking green bins in a shed until the morning of pickup and banning the feeding of wildlife.

In the interim, there are things people can do to minimize conflict with their furry neighbours: Ensure your property is in good repair and garbage is well-managed. And don’t leave pet food outside or feed wildlife.

Weapons of warfare

Squirrels	
 <p>AAA Gates' Wildlife Control</p>	Squirrels, and raccoons, are great climbers so minimize access to the roof by trimming trees, cutting vines and removing old TV antennas, says Gates. Also, cap chimneys, fix broken shingles and screen roof soffits and vents. He says roof maintenance is key, otherwise water can weaken it, enabling animals to gain entry. And because downspouts act as a ladder, he suggests lubricating them with K-Y Jelly, which is preferable to Vaseline because it’s water-soluble.
Raccoons	
Foxes	
Coyotes	
Skunks	

Tales of tails

The Star asked readers to share wildlife experiences and received about 200 submissions . Here is the story of Boomerang the skunk. See more stories online at thestar.com/living.

This skunk got drunk

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Life

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 Simon Ostler @SimonOstler	29m
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🔄 Retweeted by Kristin Rushowy	
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 Amy Pataki @amypataki	30m
What was your favourite Chinese restaurant growing up? For many in Forest Hill, House of Chan was it, on.thestar.com/1MXhF0z #dining	
📄 Show Summary ↩️ ↪️ ★	
 Marina Queirolo	5h

From around the web



15 Photos



Kevin Bacon Claims

Boomerang the skunk visited my Toronto Annex house's garden nightly in August 2006. I dreaded him spraying my dog.

First I sprinkled Critter Ridder, powdered pepper, on the flowers. It worked for two nights, but Boomerang returned on the third, laughing at me.

Friends suggested using sweet wine to make Boomerang drunk, so he would avoid the location where he became sick. Because my husband and I didn't like sweet wine, we had to choose between Sabra and Kahlua liqueurs. It was either serve the Sabra or shop for Manischewitz wine. Even if Boomerang was kosher, we preferred not to buy him his own bottle.

That night I watched Boomerang zigzagging. Success!

No, I'd underestimated him again. He slept it off, then returned, looking for more. The next morning, I was amazed to find Boomerang's Sabra bowl three-quarters full.

I trained my dog to come, fetch and sit. And I trained my skunk to drink responsibly.

Submitted by Barbara Etlin

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