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News / Scrum / Humans, not raccoons, are the problem

Thu May 14 2015 Posted by David Rider, City Hall Bureau Chief at 07:33 PM

Humans, not raccoons, are the problem

The city really needs to "focus on addressing the human behavioural contributors to urban wildlife issues."

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Raccoons are not the problematic side of the equation in wildlife-human conflicts across Toronto, city staff say.

Councillors on the licensing and standards committee asked staff to to report on how the city monitors its urban wildlife populations and identify best practices to reduce the negative impact of wildlife on public health, safety, and private property. Staff were asked how the city can control "exploding wildlife populations, particularly raccoons."

The answer might not be what the politicians expected – the critters are not the problem. "Research and best practice indicate that governments/municipalities ought to focus on addressing the human behavioural contributors to urban wildlife issues rather than implement programs that attempt to control wildlife populations," states the report that goes to committee next week. "Experience thus far demonstrates that education efforts and, where necessary, enforcement related to human conduct, may be a more successful long-term solution to human-wildlife conflict versus a cull or wildlife sterilization program, which are either difficult to implement in urban environments, cost prohibitive,

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or unsuccessful in controlling wildlife populations."

Recommendations including strengthening public education campaigns, developing a human-wildlife conflict mitigation strategy and considering a bylaw that makes it illegal to feed wildlife on private property.

This very thorough study including professional polling of Toronto that reveals more Etobicoke-York residents report raccoon encounters at home than do Torontonians elsewhere. Also, three-quarters of Torontonians agree there is an overpopulation of raccoons but most also feel we need to learn how to live with urban wildlife.

Torontonians are evenly split on whether the city should "undertake a cull of wildlife."

But an urban wildlife wrangler says city staff got it right.

"I wholeheartedly agree with their approach," says Brad Gates, owner of Toronto's AAA Gates' Wildlife Control.

"All animals' populations are controlled by two factors - the food available and the amount of shelter. Controlling either of those will naturally bring down the population."

Gates says Toronto's new, reportedly racoon-proof green bin should, on their own over time, help reduce raccoon ranks.

Toronto racoon litters used to be 3 to 4 babies, he says, but with more nutrition out there, litters now run 5 to 7.

Pro-active depopulation measures, Gates says, tend to be ineffective or even backfire, with animals overpopulating to fill a void.

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