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- [☰ \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

**Events** ▶ (Javascript:void(0))

**Event Calendar** (/Events-calendar/)

**Concerts** (/Concerts/)

**Family** (/Toronto-events/family/)

**Food** (/Food/)

**Free Events** (/Free-events/)

**Theatre** (/Theatre/)

**LGBTQ Events** (/Events-calendar/?q=&category=lgbtq)

**Things To Do** ▶ (Javascript:void(0))

**All Things To Do** (/Things-to-do/)

**Contests** (/Toronto-whatson/contests/)

**Food And Drink** ▶ (Javascript:void(0))

**All Food And Drink** (/Toronto-whatson/food-and-drink/)

**Toronto's Best** (/Food-drink/torontos-best/)

**Opinion** ▶ (Javascript:void(0))

**All Opinion** (/Toronto-opinion/)

**Horoscopes** (/Toronto-opinion/horoscopes/)

**Neighbourhood News** ▶ (Javascript:void(0))

**All Neighbourhood News** (/Toronto-news/)

**Business** (/Toronto-news/business/)

**Cannabis And You** (/Toronto-news/cannabis-and-you/)

**City Hall** (/Toronto-news/city-hall/)

**Crime** (/Toronto-news/crime/)

[Central Toronto \(/Toronto-news/central-toronto/\)](/Toronto-news/central-toronto/)[East York \(/Toronto-news/east-york/\)](/Toronto-news/east-york/)[Etobicoke \(/Toronto-news/etobicoke/\)](/Toronto-news/etobicoke/)[North York \(/Toronto-news/north-york/\)](/Toronto-news/north-york/)[Scarborough \(/Toronto-news/scarborough/\)](/Toronto-news/scarborough/)[York \(/Toronto-news/york/\)](/Toronto-news/york/)[Obituaries \(/Toronto-announcements/obituaries-death-notices/\)](/Toronto-announcements/obituaries-death-notices/)[Vote 2019 \(/Toronto-news/federal-election/\)](/Toronto-news/federal-election/)[City Living ▾ \(Javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)[All City Living \(/Toronto-news/city-living/\)](/Toronto-news/city-living/)[Walkabouts \(/Search/allarticles/?q=walkabout&location=toronto\)](/Search/allarticles/?q=walkabout&location=toronto)[Metroland News \(Http://www.metroland.com/newspapers?id=about\)](Http://www.metroland.com/newspapers?id=about)[Terms Of Use \(Http://www.metroland.com/terms-of-use\)](Http://www.metroland.com/terms-of-use)

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- [Events ▾ \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

[Event Calendar \(/Events-calendar/\)](/Events-calendar/)[Concerts \(/Concerts/\)](/Concerts/)[Family \(/Toronto-events/family/\)](/Toronto-events/family/)[Food \(/Food/\)](/Food/)[Free Events \(/Free-events/\)](/Free-events/)[Theatre \(/Theatre/\)](/Theatre/)[LGBTQ Events \(/Events-calendar/?q=&category=lgbtq\)](/Events-calendar/?q=&category=lgbtq)

- [Things To Do ▾ \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

[All Things To Do \(/Things-to-do/\)](/Things-to-do/)[Contests \(/Toronto-whatson/contests/\)](/Toronto-whatson/contests/)

- [Food and Drink ▾ \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

[All Food And Drink \(/Toronto-whatson/food-and-drink/\)](/Toronto-whatson/food-and-drink/)[Toronto's Best \(/Food-drink/torontos-best/\)](/Food-drink/torontos-best/)

- [Opinion ▾ \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

- |  |
|--|
| <a href="/Toronto-opinion/">All Opinion (/Toronto-opinion/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-opinion/horoscopes/">Horoscopes (/Toronto-opinion/horoscopes/)</a>   |
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| <a href="/Toronto-news/">All Neighbourhood News (/Toronto-news/)</a>   |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/business/">Business (/Toronto-news/business/)</a>   |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/cannabis-and-you/">Cannabis And You (/Toronto-news/cannabis-and-you/)</a>                                       |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/city-hall/">City Hall (/Toronto-news/city-hall/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/crime/">Crime (/Toronto-news/crime/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/central-toronto/">Central Toronto (/Toronto-news/central-toronto/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/east-york/">East York (/Toronto-news/east-york/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/etobicoke/">Etobicoke (/Toronto-news/etobicoke/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/north-york/">North York (/Toronto-news/north-york/)</a>   |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/scarborough/">Scarborough (/Toronto-news/scarborough/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/york/">York (/Toronto-news/york/)</a>   |
| <a href="/Toronto-announcements/obituaries-death-notices/">Obituaries (/Toronto-announcements/obituaries-death-notices/)</a>           |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/federal-election/">Vote 2019 (/Toronto-news/federal-election/)</a>  |
| • <a href="#">City Living</a> ▼ (javascript:void(0))   |
| <a href="/Toronto-news/city-living/">All City Living (/Toronto-news/city-living/)</a>  |
| <a href="/Search/allarticles/?q=walkabout&amp;location=toronto">Walkabouts (/Search/allarticles/?q=walkabout&amp;location=toronto)</a> |
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## 7 bits of advice on how to deal with Toronto wildlife

News Mar 21, 2015 City Centre Mirror



*Brad Gates, owner of Gates Wildlife Control, and technician Scott Liddle discovered three albino raccoons whose mother had taken residence in a Scarborough home. - Photo/COURTESY*

The animals are in there already, under that porch and in the attic and under the roof of that garage. They've been in a semi-hibernating state, but their litters are being born, and over the next few weeks Toronto homes will become "home" to a new generation of baby raccoons, skunks, possums, and squirrels. They were here before us, but surely not as big, or fearless, or as prolific as they are now. How can you and the city's more common critters get along? The answers below are gleaned from experts at an open house on human-wildlife "conflicts" recently at Scarborough's McGregor Park Community Centre.

1. What should I do if the raccoons are using my shed or back deck as a latrine?

Try setting out ammonia-soaked rags, or motion-sensored lights. Some people feed pets outside. Even if the food isn't out there, sometimes the smell of it's there. You might need to call a reputable private wildlife company. Though people can feel intimidated by raccoons, if you can scream and yell and stamp, they will definitely run away, unless cornered. "They still realize people can hurt them. You can't be timid about it," says MaryLou Leiher, a program manager with Toronto Animal Services. Some people build a wooden casing around their barbecue. Don't ignore the little tray under the barbecue that fills up with fat. That needs to be cleaned out regularly.

2. What are some things I can do to keep raccoons out of my house?

Inspect your roof and replace worn, curled or cracked shingles and soffits. Repair any opening in your attic (but don't use chicken wire - it isn't strong enough). Trim tree branches hanging over your roof. Hang a one-metre-wide sheet metal collar around your trees two metres above the ground and remove branches below the metal. Also, cover your chimneys with an animal-proof chimney cap, says the Canadian Association for Humane Trapping.

3. How can I keep those raccoons out of my recycling bins, and does that bungee cord trick really work?

Raccoons are quick learners and know how to get into the bins. Don't set the bins out the night before collection. Usually, by 7 a.m., all raccoons and other animals interested in your recyclables are gone. If you store the bins in a garage or shed, make sure the doors and windows are closed. Toronto's solid waste division gets the most complaints about the smaller, green bins; they're very easy to tip. "I believe they're working on new designs," adds a city employee who wouldn't give his name. He said he uses a bungee cord sometimes. The city tells people to use a bungee cord with a hook to fasten the green bin to a fence or wall a couple of feet off the ground. (Remove the cord before collection.) Some commercial recycling bins are on a night collection schedule, and those businesses find it especially challenging to keep critters out, but well-tied or sealed bags are less enticing. If you freeze organic waste before putting it in the bin, that will eliminate food odours.

4. How do I stop skunks from digging under my shed, deck, or under the front porch?

Skunks will dig under structures. During the day dig a trench and bury pieces of L-shaped galvanized metal mesh, as a prevention skirt. If the toe of the "L" points outward, skunks can't get under it. But you need to leave the entrance open until all the animals have left (usually between July and November). If babies are in the den and the mother is frantic to get in, a metal barrier can cause a worse mess. It's better to wait until the young skunks are joining the mother to forage. You can sprinkle flour in front of the den to see if the babies are coming out. All wild animals set up more than one den site. "If you can get the animal out before the litter is born, that's ideal." - MaryLou Leiher, program manager, Toronto Animal Services.

5. What if I see a bird or another animal I think might be hurt, or orphaned or abandoned by its parents?

If the animal is dead (an unpleasant smell generally follows), call Toronto Animal Services, but if the animal appears injured or "in distress," the Toronto Wildlife Centre has a hotline, 416-631-0062, answered any day of the year. On the hotline, you can give the Wildlife Centre (which depends entirely on donations) some details; the person answering will tell you whether that "orphan" animal really is an orphan. Many aren't. Baby birds can live on the ground as fledglings, and if you keep and hand-raise one, "it won't know it's own song. It won't do well in the wild," says Debbie Michlits, a Wildlife Centre volunteer.

6. What do I do if I see a fox or coyote that is "bold" and seems to be unafraid of people?

If a coyote or fox you meet is coming closer it's usually because someone has been feeding it, intentionally or not. Should you come across a coyote or fox that doesn't run away, make noise - clap your hands, yell, stamp your feet - but don't chase the animal. You might also carry a whistle or other noisemaker while walking in areas where coyotes or foxes are known to frequent. Coyotes can snatch away small free-roaming pets. Keep cats indoors or supervised while outside, and keep small dogs on a leash. - Toronto Wildlife Centre

7. Is it okay to feed some wild animals - you know, in case they're really hungry?

"You don't need to feed wild animals. They do not need you to feed them. Ever." - MaryLou Leiher, program manager, Toronto Animal Services.

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