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URBAN ANIMALS

The 'Wild West' of wildlife control

Experience with a rotting raccoon underscores lack of regulation in field

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When the smell began keeping her up at night and the flies began to take over her house, Yolanda Yang knew that something had gone terribly wrong.

Three months earlier in early February, when Ms. Yang began hearing thudding noises in her Richmond Hill home, she called a wildlife removal company to get rid of what she believed to be a raccoon in the attic. The company set up a one-way door for the creature to escape through, and steel screens on the vents on her roof. The raccoon would leave on its own, she was told.

Still, she kept hearing the thudding. At her request, the company returned four times over the next three months, even reinstalling the one-way door, but the noise didn't stop. She went on vacation for a month, only to return in early May to the flies and the smell. She knew the animal was dead.

After contacting the company again, the technician deemed the work "solid" and said there was no smell. But almost a month later, when the situation became unbearable, she called a different company. Brad Gates, the owner of AAA Gates Wildlife Control, was the one who found the raccoon inside the wall of her house.

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difficult because the wildlife removal industry, for the most part, is unregulated. There is no licence required for wildlife removal agents, nor is any training or qualification necessary so long as companies follow OSPCA guidelines and do not kill the animals.

This has led to many practices ranging from "bad, just because they don't know what they're doing, to outright cruel," said Nathalie Karvonen, executive director of the

"I can probably say it had been dead for two months," Mr. Gates said. "It didn't have any flesh on its body."

Ms. Yang said she wonders if the original company, AAA All Seasons Wildlife, ever actually entered the attic during their visits. A spokesman for the company, who would identify himself only as "Peter" and declined to give a last name, said the company does check areas before and after setting up one-way doors.

"We've been there five times," he said. "Every time she's called, we've gone back. But I mean, if we check our work, all our work is intact, she says there's a smell, our guy doesn't smell anything, he's got nothing to go on."

When told about the dead raccoon, he said it might have been dead all along, or even a different raccoon, because Ms. Yang refused additional preventive measures. He also defended the company's F-rating from the Better Business Bureau in mid-June, saying, "We always respond to their complaints, but there's only so much you can do to satisfy people."

Meanwhile, Ms. Yang has been trying to find answers, but incidents like hers are especially

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Toronto Wildlife Centre. Ms. Karvonen, along with a group of industry players, has been lobbying the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for stricter regulations, but so far to little avail.

John Dungavell, a wildlife policy adviser with the ministry, said the government is reviewing recommendations for licensing, but that "licensing is not necessarily the panacea to all the problems." He said that training agents and informing the public about proper practices are just as important.

But Mr. Gates, who said he does five or six jobs a week for customers dissatisfied with the work of previous companies, said more still needs to be done. "The government isn't in a position to license us, so there isn't any formal training," he said. "So everybody is kind of forced to learn by trial."

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