

## Living Near Wildlife

California is one of the most populous states in the nation and the number of residents grows each year. More residential and commercial development occurs to accommodate this increasing population, and this development affects land and water habitats that historically have been home to wildlife species. Human encroachment on wildlife habitat leads to more people coming into contact with wildlife, thus increasing the incidence of wildlife and human conflict. The loss of traditional habitat through natural processes, e.g. drought and wildfires, also has caused wildlife to migrate to populated areas in search of food and water.

Wildlife that enters neighborhoods or appears within populated areas is considered nuisance wildlife. Nuisance species such as black bear, mountain lion, deer, turkey, coyote, skunk, raccoon and opossum, can damage property, crops and livestock. More significant is the threat some species often pose to public safety as shown by their, albeit limited, history of attacks on humans and their pets.

Members of the public believe more can be done to prevent the ill effects of nuisance wildlife. Department of Fish and Game (DFG) wardens are the primary responders for public safety incidents and often respond to nuisance wildlife conflicts. DFG frequently relies upon the expertise of its wildlife biologists, game wardens and veterinarians to help determine the best remedy for a nuisance animal. Options include translocation to a less populated area if the animal poses no threat and is determined able to successfully return to the wild, placement with a rehabilitation facility if the animal has become too reliant upon human food sources and/or has acclimated to human interaction, or the humane euthanization of the animal if it poses a public safety threat.

Some animal control measures are not well-received by animal rights activists or special interest groups. Among these groups are individuals that believe animals should be rescued and either returned successfully to the wild or housed in a sanctuary or zoo facility. Some have rescued and returned animals to the wild on their own. Each of these actions poses an unreasonable threat to both people and wildlife, and is in violation of either DFG policy or state law. Wild animals that have lost their fear of humans and human environments are a potential safety and economic liability. Also, these actions are fundamentally contrary to the mission and role of DFG, to maintain wild animals as wild and to let natural processes work as much as possible.

DFG has focused significant resources in educating the public about nuisance wildlife. Specifically, how to reduce attractants and employ safety precautions to avoid interactions, especially with bear and mountain lion, and DFG's strategy and policies are for addressing nuisance wildlife and potential threats to public safety. DFG's outreach efforts include the specific scientific basis upon which DFG develops and implements its strategy and the steps taken to determine the best remedy for human wildlife conflicts that keep the best interests of public and wildlife safety in mind.