

## Urban Wildlife Can Be a Problem

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Recently, in less than 24 hours, I had two different local residents ask me about dealing with skunks. In the space of a week no less than ten people asked me about moles. With those kind of random hints it's an excellent indicator of a topic I need to address in this column! There seems to be a general feeling that if you live inside the city limits, wildlife do not exist. Well, news flash, that is far from the truth.

Yes, urban development will often displace some species of wildlife. But other species follow right along with that urbanization and do very well. Our towns simply aren't so big that they are going to displace all the wildlife. When we build our homes where creatures used to have their's we are often going to wind up with a little bit of adapting, by both them and us, as we end up, sometimes unknowingly, sharing the same space.

Some species, like the aforementioned moles, we will never get rid of. Even with trapping, and other attempts to "depopulate" or "relocate", we simply create a void for another one to move in to given enough time. The biological needs of wildlife are not that different from our own. They need, food, water and shelter. If those three items are provided, intentionally or inadvertently, you will eventually have urban wildlife in you yard.

If you water your lawn and have a well maintained lawn, you are probably going to have a good soil environment for earthworms, grubs and other insects that moles eat. The irrigation creates a perfect soil condition for the mole to move around your yard looking for food. Moles will become less active with colder weather so I'd suggest waiting until next spring to try dealing with them.

Skunks (and raccoons and opossums) create some very unique challenges. We create a virtual buffet line of feeding opportunities for these species. Do you know anyone who feeds a dog or cat outside? I'll guarantee you that there's more than just a dog or cat feeding on that food! So the first step in dealing with any of these critters is to start eliminating food sources.

Skunks are quite omnivorous. In addition to eating pet food, they are also quite fond of insects. They will dig for grubs and worms in your yard. Skunks are often attracted to spilled bird seed on the ground, not so much for the seed itself, but for the insects and rodents that are also attracted to the bird seed.

If you are starting to have problems with urban wildlife, start looking for food sources and remove them. Don't leave pet food outdoors overnight. Clean up bird seed that has been spilled. The larger the pile of bird seed in your backyard, the larger the potential problems that it will attract.

Out in the country we'd probably use a technique known as firearm depopulation to deal with a problematic skunk or raccoon. This isn't an option within the city limits so you may have to resort to live capture traps. We have a series of good bulletins at the Extension Office (119 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Junction City) on live trapping these species including some good hints on how to NOT get sprayed by a skunk!

Yes, you will see a lot of wildlife living in the city. Much of it will be observed in passing. But if it starts to become a regular resident in your yard, we may have to have a discussion of how to deal with this challenge!