

FOX IN THE HENHOUSE AGAIN!



Predators can sour your home sweet home but there are ways to protect your small animals

Rex Lockman

Chickens, ducks, geese, and rabbits can be fun to have around and a great asset to a rural property but when predators find them, it can be a nightmare.

Fox, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, and weasels – to name the more common predators – can be a real nuisance when trying to raise small animals. There are many different ways to deal with these nuisances. We have to be creative in dealing with these varmints.

Think Ahead

Prior planning is always best. Predators are most active at night. When building a structure to house animals overnight, ensure there are no holes, gaps, or even cracks.

Weasels can squeeze through amazingly small holes (some estimates as small as 1 inch!), and other critters will chew through wood if there is a small hole or crack to get them started. Consider tacking small, woven wire around the edges to discourage animals from trying to chew or pry on edges.

Woven wire fences are effective at keeping most varmints out until they start to dig underneath. To discourage digging, either bury about 12 inches of woven wire below the soil level or attach additional woven wire to the bottom of the fence and lay it on the ground 12 to 18 inches away from the fence. Make sure to pin it to the ground. Select woven wire that has small enough holes predators cannot get through (some

suggest as small as one-half inch).

Don't invite these critters over for dinner. Keep potential food items picked up and unavailable. They will be drawn to pet food lying around or to unsecured garbage cans. Getting rid of predators will be more difficult once they find your place.

Keep vegetation mowed or trimmed. Often, these animals don't like to come into areas lacking good cover. Keeping vegetation short within 100 feet of the animal shelter will discourage most predators.

Trapping as an Alternative

So, what if there is a pest you've tried everything to get rid of and it is still killing your animals? Trapping can be a very effective tool if done correctly. There are two options: live or kill traps. You need a good idea of



Long-tailed weasel



Live trap

what animal the predator is or at least the animal size to determine the size of trap. Once determined, decide if you want to live trap or kill it.

A live trap has bait to lure the animal in, and the cage closes behind so the animal is untouched. Make sure you have a relocation area if you decide to live trap. Ideally, this location is far from any other place this critter will cause problems because it may travel great distances. Especially after getting food from around homesteads, they will search these areas out.

Let the predator become comfortable before setting live traps. Wire the trap open, put bait in, and keep them baited for a few days. If it is set to trap and the animal isn't used to it, they will nose around it at first, which may set the trap off without the animal in it. This will make them leery of the trap and a lot harder to catch.

The advantage about live traps over kill traps is that you don't have to worry about hurting pets. Because of this safety feature, live traps can be used to catch and easily move predators.

If using kill traps, use wire to hold kill traps open to allow the animals to get used to them. Once they are used to eating off them, set the traps to snap. If you feel uncomfortable or just don't want to mess with trapping, there is often a local trapper who will help for a fee. Contact your local conservation district, UW Extension, or Wyoming Game and Fish Department office. They can often assist in finding a trapper or help with advice.

Deterring animals can be effective and works best if an animal has just started harassing your place. However, once they are used to the surroundings, a scarecrow or other deterrent will lose effectiveness over time. Dogs can often be a good deterrent if left outside at night (depending on the dog and your willingness to have them smell like a skunk). Ensure they are protected from harsh elements.

As pesky and irritating as these critters can be, it is part of living in the country and adds to the adventure. You will be telling your grandkids stories about the time the skunk and her babies got in the garage.

Rex Lockman just might be looking for a predator right now. He is the wildlife and range specialist with the Laramie County Conservation District and can be reached at (307) 772-2600 or at rlockman@lccdnet.org.