



Precautions can help stop predator damage on your property

Rex Lockman

Big animals like bears, mountain lions, or wolves are often envisioned when someone says predator.

On the average homestead (or place in town) there are many small predators that can sour your home sweet home, but there are ways to protect small animals and other things you value.

Avoid attracting their attention

Don't invite nuisance animals over for dinner. Getting rid of predators will be more difficult once they find your place. Keep potential food items picked up and unavailable. They will be drawn to pet food lying around or to unsecured garbage cans. Keep vegetation moved or trimmed close to the things you'd like to protect. Often, these animals don't like to come into areas lacking good cover due to their fear of becoming prey to larger or aerial predators. Keeping vegetation short within 100 feet of an animal shelter will discourage most predators.

Keeping them out to protect small animals

Predators are most active at night. Ensure there are no holes, gaps, or even cracks when building a structure that will house animals

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

Woven wire fences are effective at keeping most varmints out. Select woven wire with small enough holes predators cannot get through (some suggest as small as one-half inch for smaller predators). This type of fencing works well until they start to dig underneath. To discourage digging, either bury the woven wire to about 12 inches 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 so predators can't get under it easily.

Trapping

Live trapping is an effective way to get rid of unwanted wildlife and keep pets from getting injured. If a domestic cat (or other pet) is caught, it can be released. Before live trapping is done, make sure to select a release location miles from other homes (so it will not become a nuisance for others). Contact your local Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) office for information on whether trapping the predator you are having issues with is legal and the locations for releasing animals.

Handle all wildlife carefully because they can bite. Also, fleas are common on wildlife so when handling the trap with the animal, make sure to wear a long-sleeve shirt, pants, and gloves. Insect repellent would also be beneficial.



Live trapping is an effective tool to relocate unwanted wildlife. Check with a local Wyoming Game and Fish Department office for legal information and areas approved for relocating an animal.

An animal may have rabies if acting unusually or aggressively. Stay away from the trapped animal and call a veterinarian, animal control, or the local WGFD office. Skunks are often unintentionally caught in live traps, creating another problem. Use a large piece of plastic or unwanted tarp and approach the trap using this as a shield, then drape the plastic over the trap and wrap it up to haul it away to release the animal.

Killer traps work well as long as pets, children, or non-target animals are not in the area. Dispose of the

animal in a place pets and other animals cannot get to and wear a long-sleeve shirt, pants, gloves, and insect repellent.

If neighbors are close by, you may want to visit with them before starting this type of trapping so they are aware and can keep animals inside and kids away. Also, when using kill traps, be aware of all the animals that live in your area. If using bigger traps that may catch fox or badger, for example, then you will want to contact your local WGFD office or game warden to find out the laws on trapping fur-bearing animals. You may have to obtain a license.

The WGFD and other organizations provide a wealth of information online to landowners on subjects such as strategies to deter various forms of wildlife (including fencing specifications for predators and herbivores like deer that may be devouring your vegetable patch). You can find links to these resources by visiting our "Wildlife" page at <http://www.uwyo.edu/barnbackyard>.

Wrapping a piece of sheet metal around a tree trunk about 3 feet high then bending the sheet metal over so it sticks out about 10 inches from the trunk can often protect fruit trees from predators. Predators can't climb on the sheet metal, and the bent-over portion will prevent them from jumping over.

Rex Lockman knows about varmints. He is the wildlife and range management specialist with the Laramie County Conservation District and can be reached at (307) 772-2600 or at rexlock1@gmail.com.