Sarah Riley

Relocating Wildlife Is Prohibited in Rhode Island

Capturing a wild animal, whether in your backyard or elsewhere, and releasing it in another location is prohibited in Rhode Island. Regulations adopted by the Department of Environmental Management prohibit the translocation of "protected furbearers." Protected furbearers as defined in Rhode Island General Law 20-16-1 include: raccoon, opossum, skunk, gray squirrel, rabbits, woodchuck, muskrat, beaver, weasels, fisher, mink, red and gray fox, coyote, river otter, and bobcat.

Some of these species may at times be responsible for damage to homes, gardens, lawns, livestock, or other property. Property owners may be inclined to offer the offending animal a "second chance" by live trapping it and moving it to a "new home," but for or a variety of reasons this activity is not in the best interest of the public or wildlife. A few of these reasons are listed here.

It can spread wildlife diseases.

Moving animals randomly around the landscape will increase the chance of introducing diseases into uninfected populations. You cannot tell if an animal is sick just by looking at it. An animal that may appear to be healthy may carry any number of diseases or parasites that can be transmitted to others of the same species, other susceptible species, or domestic animals. Some wildlife diseases can also infect humans. Traps and cages used to capture or transport animals can become contaminated by disease-carrying organisms, creating potential exposure risks to humans and pets.

It can harm wildlife & disrupt ecosystems.

Relocated wildlife, faced with competition from others will seek food and shelter wherever available. Most relocated animals die but some do survive, adding to the local population. Increasing the local population will lead to more nuisance problems for people in the area. Raccoons, skunks, and opossums commonly raid bird nests for eggs. Releasing them onto wildlife management areas and refuges will increase nest predation of nesting songbirds, gamebirds, and shorebirds in these areas. Additionally, property owners may not want you releasing animals on their property.

Someone else is already living there!

With few exceptions, it is likely that there are already individuals of the same species living in the area. Any newly introduced animals must compete for resources, such as food and shelter, that the current residents are utilizing. Competition for resources increases stress and conflict. Many wildlife species are territorial and will vigorously defend their territories against others. Animals without established territories are at an immediate disadvantage and the odds that they will survive are low.
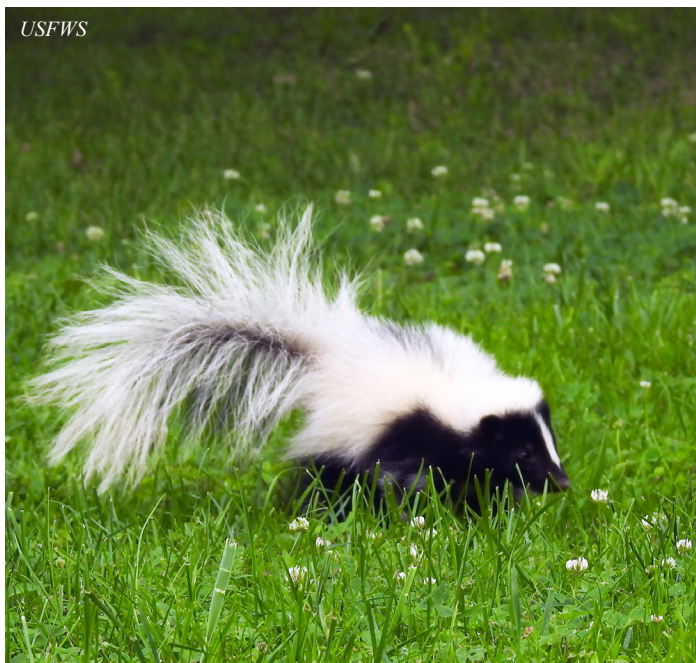
Relocated animals will try to return.

Faced with unfamiliar surroundings, competition for limited resources, and possibly having been separated from their families, relocated animals will often attempt to return. Many animals have excellent homing skills. Some animals such as squirrels and raccoons have demonstrated that they can travel great distances to return to the point of capture. Most will not survive the journey as they attempt to cross roads, are taken by predators, or meet some other demise.

Protect & support ALL wildlife and their habitats.

Introducing animals into places where they do not currently live may cause unintended consequences for other species that have adapted to life without them. The islands of Narragansett Bay and Block Island, because of their isolation, lack some or many of the furbearer species that occur in mainland portions of Rhode Island. The birds, amphibians, and other wildlife that naturally occupy these locations thrive in part because of the absence of certain predators or competition. The introduction of a new predator or competitor will negatively impact resident wildlife and removal of an introduced species, once established is often impossible.

Relocation alone does not solve your problem!

Unless you take appropriate steps, such as removing food sources or sealing off entryways into or under structures, it is only a matter of time before some other animal moves in to take the past occupants place. Food sources may or may not be obvious. Pet food dishes left outside, garbage, compost piles, and bird feeders, fruit trees and vines all provide food for wildlife. Identify and remove all potential food sources. Sheds elevated on blocks, porches, uncapped chimneys, and poorly maintained structures all provide potential shelters

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MORE INFORMATION

If you are experiencing a problem with wildlife you can visit the RIDEM website at www.dem.ri.gov/wildlife. There you will find fact sheets on a variety of wildlife species which can provide you with information on the species in question and advice on how to prevent or eliminate problems.

Remember, most situations involving nuisance wildlife come down to two issues: food and shelter. Identifying and eliminating potential food sources and preventing access to potential den sites are the only ways to prevent recurring problems. **RIDEM does not remove or relocate nuisance wildlife.**

Property owners, as provided for under RIGL 20-16-2 may kill, by legal means, any furbearer on their own property that is killing livestock, domestic pets, damaging property or crops, provided that the carcass of the animal is turned over to the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife. In situations where capture and removal of nuisance animals is necessary or the desire of the property owner they will be referred to a Nuisance Wildlife Control Specialist (NWCS). Nuisance Wildlife Control Specialists are professionals licensed by the RIDEM who provide wildlife control services to the public for a fee. NWCS are experienced in species identification, capture, handling, exclusion, regulations, and humane, legal euthanasia techniques. A list of licensed NWCS is available from the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife.

CONTACT US

If you need additional information please contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife at DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov or (401) 789-0281. Staff biologists can provide suggestions to help you resolve your problem.