

THE NEXT STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Keeping Animals Out

What can you do to remove a wild animal that's under or in your house? Or to prevent one from getting in? This might include rats, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, bats, birds, opossums, and foxes. **There are two main stages to a less-toxic more-humane process: Eviction and Exclusion. Let's start by looking at one example process.**

Squirrel Away

In this year's survey, a reader asked about addressing squirrel problems. I generally encourage folks to enjoy the company of these intelligent and playful creatures.

However, it's also reasonable to want to keep them out of our homes. They can enter seeking food, shelter, and nesting areas. But they can also cause damage by gnawing through insulation, wood, electrical wires, and plumbing pipes. And they can carry fleas!

Thankfully, they're not naturally aggressive and there are non-lethal ways to remove them. (Be careful though if you get near them. They can get frantic if cornered, then bite or scratch, and transfer disease.)

Gentle Eviction Steps

1) If a squirrel gets into an inhabited space, make it easy for them to find an exit. They don't want to live there. Remove pets and food from



the area. Open doors and windows there (though not windows that open to concrete or hard surfaces). Close doors to other parts of the house, and leave the room.

2) If squirrels get into your attic (say through a hole or loose board), try frightening them away. So make loud noises. Bang on walls or pans. Yell. Leave a radio or TV on there. Or leave a bright light there. Or place rags soaked in cider vinegar; they don't like the smell.

3) If they still don't leave your space, they might have babies there. If so, consider letting the babies grow and leave on their own. Ask a professional for advice about that.

4) If you confirm that there are no babies inside, you can also gently evict them with a one-way exclusion door. With these, the animal can leave but not get back in. (It's essential to check for babies first, because they might not be able to leave, and you don't want a desperate mother trying to get back in.)

5) For more information on the above tips, plus evicting a squirrel from a chimney, see www.thespruce.com/getting-squirrels-out-of-your-house-2656316.

6) Consider calling a professional with experience in gently and safely managing these wild animals. Do this especially if you think they might be inside a wall or ceiling. An expert can know the laws, best techniques, and timing. Plus they can have special equipment, such as one-

Local Toxics Disposal

■ **To discard your household toxics safely, bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility.** It's at 500 Mecham Road, between Cotati and Petaluma, and is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 7:30am to 2:30pm.

■ **Check the Zero Waste Sonoma website (www.zerowastesonoma.gov)** for more information on this, or to see what city HHW Collection Events are currently scheduled. Or call 707/565-3375 or 707/364-6927.

way doors — plus thermal imaging, which can non-invasively identify where a pest is in your house and reveal hidden entry points. You might request that the service help animals leave alive, and ask you before using any toxic product.

Exclusion: Blocking Re-entry

1) Once you've removed the squirrel, identify how it got in. You might see tracks around the chimney, nests in the attic, and/or holes in the foundation or exterior.

2) Seal those entry points. Consider metal flashing or mesh, because animals can't chew through them. Cover chimneys with caps. Trim branches overhanging roofs.

3) Other ways to discourage squirrels include: keeping your trash cans covered and squirrel-proofing your bird feeders. (Look online for ways to do the latter.)

For more on squirrel management, including tips if they're disrupting your garden or landscaping, see our *Index* under **Squirrels**.

The Perils of Live Trapping

When we find a wild animal in our home, we might want to trap it alive and release it elsewhere. That seems the compassionate thing to do.

However, this rarely ends well for the animal, according to the U.S. Humane Society. That's why

See Animals, over

Animals, continued

it's also usually illegal under California law. That's because:

■ When a mother animal is removed, **babies can be left behind**, either in the house or nearby, and will likely die of starvation.

■ **Animals do not easily survive when dropped into a strange area.** They don't know where to find shelter, food, or water. They'll often be chased or attacked by the animals currently in that territory. And they don't know where to go to escape.

■ **Animals can get scared and homeowners can find themselves injured** when trying to handle these wild animals.

Note: You can trap and release mice and rats at your site only. But they'll likely just get inside again.

There are various non-lethal ways to encourage most wild animals to leave your home. These vary by animal, so look online for animal-specific eviction tips.

SOURCE: www.humanesociety.org/resources/scrab-trap-when-evicting-wildlife

Exclusion Is a Good Thing!

As the squirrel example illustrates, exclusion (or blocking animals' entry) is a key nontoxic and non-lethal way to keep animals out of your home — and avoid the use of poisons!

If you already have animal guests, **it's crucial to be sure they're all**

gone before doing exclusion, so they don't get trapped inside. You can also do exclusion **proactively.**

Exclusion's specific steps vary by the pest. It can be as simple as tracking a stream of kitchen ants to where they enter the house, then caulking. Or it might entail surveying the outside of your home and filling holes, repairing vents, etc.

You can often do exclusion yourself. Or you might hire a professional with appropriate experience, tools, and techniques.

Getting Help

You can find various useful local products and services online and at <https://bit.ly/3dMKK9o>.

Here are some local services that interested me. They can help with both eviction and exclusion.

■ **Sebastopol's Animal Out Solutions.** With the tagline "Humane Wildlife Services," it offers thermal imaging, motion-activated cameras, a two-year warranty, and more. www.animaloutsolutions.com

■ **A Wildlife Exclusion Service (AWES).** Based in Petaluma, it offers camera monitoring, helpful information online, and free phone help. It's operated by the nonprofit Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue (SCWR), and its proceeds fund SCWR's programs. www.awces.com. **Also, contact SCWR if you find sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife in Sonoma County.** www.scwildliferescue.org

See more pest control tips in our *Index*, under the specific pest.

Yellowjackets Nesting

Yellowjackets. Unfortunately these aggressive wasps can persist even after summer turns into fall. With the ground dry, their food sources sparse, and nests full, they can actually be more aggressive in seeking food.

I've previously written about various less-toxic ways to address their incursions. (See our *Index* under **Wasps**.) **And I recently experienced one of their most hazardous nest sites: in the ground.** Huge numbers of yellowjackets were streaming in and out of a small ground hole in my backyard. Eek!

So this gave me a chance to try out a free County service! Yes, if you find and mark the location of your yellowjacket ground nest, the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District will address it at no cost to you! They do this because they don't want us doing it and hurting ourselves and others, especially those who are allergic.

I started by filling out the request form online. (You can also call them.) Two workdays later, I discovered a guy in my driveway putting on a full white bee suit! He said he'd confirmed the nest and was going to treat it. (I did indicate on the form that they needed my permission before entry, but he missed that.)

He was friendly and helpful. I asked to see the product he planned to use. I saw that the insecticide's name was Drione and that its toxicity was rated at Caution. It also seemed to me that most of the risks would be managed by his professional attire, so I said OK.

It didn't take him long to dust the Drione powder into the nest. Then he said to stay away from it that day, and check the next morning. If there were no yellowjackets going up and down vertically, it had worked. And indeed the next day they were gone. Yay!

For information on finding and marking a ground nest, and requesting an appointment, see www.msosquito.org/how-to-find-an-underground-yellowjacket-nest-cf28a02.

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. STEP is a project of the **City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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Got a pest problem? Or a toxics question?

The STEP Online Index can help! It's easy to look up your topic and find our well-researched, condensed, and useful information — to help you get up-to-speed and into action. It also makes it easy to share this information! Plus you and others can get on our low-volume email list, to hear when new issues are online.

www.healthyworld.org/STEP