

**Wildlife**

ACO CORE COMPETENCIES

Training Guide page 14

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**ACO Responsibilities**

- While ACO duties outlined in Chapter 140 pertain to domestic animals, many ACOs are answering calls about wildlife concerns on a daily basis.
- With the significant public health concerns related to possible rabies exposures or other zoonotic diseases, it is essential that your agency establish an effective policy to deal with conflicts with wildlife.



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**Handling Wildlife Calls**


Many wildlife calls can be handled through community education, but it is essential to gather all the information before offering solutions, so you can determine if the issue is a public safety threat.

What is the species?




Was there direct contact with humans or animals?

Does the animal appear sick?



Does the animal appear orphaned?

What conflict is the animal causing?



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**PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS AND DEALING WITH WILDLIFE ISSUES**

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**Wildlife Regulations**

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has laws and regulations pertaining to the keeping of wild animals
  - It may prove helpful to be familiar with these laws
    - MGL Chapter 131 & 131A
    - 321 CMR 9.00



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**MassWildlife Statutory Authority  
MGL Chapters 131&131A**

Authority over **WILD**:

- Mammals
- Birds
- Freshwater fish
- Reptiles
- Amphibians
- Endangered Species (includes plants & invertebrates)



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## Regulation Pertaining to ACOs & Wildlife

**ACOs NEED to obtain MassWildlife authorization to address wildlife issues** except in the below circumstances 321 CMR 2.14 (15) (a) & (e)

- "...Employees of a municipal entity whether elected, appointed, or otherwise...to act as problem animal control agents...shall be exempt from permit and examination requirements in the following circumstances..."
- When acting as an agent for the municipal entity, on land owned or leased by such municipal entity, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 131, § 37
- Any municipal animal control officer may kill, by legal means, any raccoon, skunk, red or gray fox, bat or woodchuck which is displaying behavior which causes the officer to reasonably conclude that the animal is diseased, or which has attacked a human (or a domestic animal).

**If you do not know whether you should be responding or how to respond, call MassWildlife and speak with a wildlife biologist.**

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## Regulation Pertaining to ACOs & Wildlife

**An ACO may only directly intervene with wildlife issues under the following circumstances.**

- If they are responding to a potentially rabid animal, **or** if they are authorized by MassWildlife to address the issue.
- If they are assisting police with nuisance wildlife issues such as traffic hazards.
- If they are responding to nuisance behavior, ACOs may harass wildlife to deal with the issue.

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## Regulation Pertaining to ACOs & Wildlife

**ACOs can always respond by providing advice and education for any wildlife situation!**



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### Regulation Pertaining to ACOs & Wildlife

If an ACO is “sworn” as a special police officer, then they may broadly address threats to public safety as a police officer would.

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### What Constitutes a Threat to Public Safety?

- A mammal exhibiting signs of rabies
- Wild animals making or attempting to make physical contact with humans
- Habituated individuals – approaching for food
- Highly defensive of a food source or young
- Animals in roadways creating traffic hazards
- Injured, diseased, habituated, etc.



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### Wildlife issues that are NOT public safety concerns

These examples are not Public safety concerns, so ACOs should only provide education.

- Wildlife with mange or other naturally occurring diseases that are not transmissible to humans
- Wildlife fecal matter (Canada geese, turkeys, beaver)
  - Except raccoon scat/latrine sites (racoon roundworm)
- Presence of wildlife in residential areas
- Day time activity
- Den sites, young wildlife
- Feeding on naturally available or human-associated food sources
- Inquisitive/curious behavior (coyotes & foxes)
- Snakes of any species





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## Trapping Wildlife

**Without the express permission of MassWildlife, it is illegal for an ACO or anyone else to attempt to trap any wild animal.**

**Unless that ACO or other individual is:**

- Targeting an animal that has been deemed a public safety threat (i.e. exhibiting signs of rabies)
- A licensed trapper operating during the regulated trapping season for that species
- Operating on city/town property or their own property where the targeted animal is causing property damage (MGL Ch. 131 Sect. 37)



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## Relocating Wildlife

**It is illegal to transport and relocate wildlife in Massachusetts.**



Animals are most often moved by people who are experiencing problems with wildlife or by those who think the animal would be better off somewhere else. Animals have great instincts and know where their habitats are. Moving them can be harmful to the animal, its habitat, and the community. If you think it would be better off somewhere else, it can harm or stress the animal. Not only is moving wildlife illegal in Massachusetts, but it is also unethical if you're experiencing a wildlife problem.

**RELOCATED ANIMALS:**

- Many try to return to their original habitat, increasing the chance of conflict with humans.
- Many die from stress and lack of food, water, and shelter.
- Many become difficult to handle, aggressive, and dangerous to humans and other animals.
- Many are hard to find or impossible to find, making it difficult to monitor their health and well-being.
- Many are hard to find or impossible to find, making it difficult to monitor their health and well-being.

**HAVING A WILDLIFE PROBLEM?**

MassWildlife can help you solve your wildlife problem. Call 1-800-352-2263 or visit our website at [www.mass.gov/masswildlife](http://www.mass.gov/masswildlife).

- Trapped animals must either be:
  - Released on the property where caught
  - Humanely euthanized by legal means

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## Sick or Injured Wildlife

- Euthanizing on site
  - (if authorized to do so)
- Common rabies vector species exhibiting symptoms
- Individuals with fatal injuries/sickness
  - with permission from MassWildlife
- Transportation for the purpose of euthanasia
- Capture and transportation to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator
- No deer, bear, or turkey; coyote & bobcat w/ MassWildlife permission only



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### Transporting Sick or Injured Wildlife





- ACOs & public may only transport sick/injured wildlife to a licensed rehabilitator.
- Transport to veterinarian for euthanasia (with MassWildlife permission)
- Animals must be caught by hand
  - rabies pole, net
  - cannot be trapped.

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### Finding a Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/find-a-wildlife-rehabilitator>

Birds

Birds & Mammals

Birds & Reptiles

Mammals

Reptiles & Mammals

Reptiles

Mammals, Birds, & Reptiles



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### Illness that is not a public safety threat

- Example: Sarcoptic Mange in Foxes & Coyotes
  - Frequently mange outbreaks accompany intentional feeding by the public
  - Stopping the feeding is the #1 thing ACOs can do to help prevent mange and its spread
  - ACOs may attempt to capture via rabies pole, net, by hand and transport to licensed rehabilitator

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## Illness that is not a public safety threat

Under Massachusetts laws it is illegal for ACOs or members of the public:

- to set box traps to attempt to catch sick animals.
- to directly administer medication (or medication laced food) to wildlife or to place any medicine intended for wildlife consumption in the environment.



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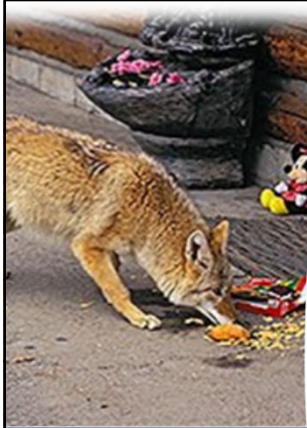
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## Nuisance Wildlife Calls

Nearly all problematic human-wildlife interactions are a result of direct or indirect feeding by people

### Solutions:

- Public education, outreach & information
  - Visit [mass.gov/masswildlife](http://mass.gov/masswildlife) for materials
- Regulated hunting and trapping
  - Can be used to help relieve some human-wildlife interactions
- Problem Animal Control Agents
  - May be hired by property owners to remove certain species of nuisance wildlife



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## Feeding Wildlife

Although feeding is not illegal in MA under MGLs it is strongly discouraged as it often results in a public nuisance or threats to human health and safety

- Discourage the public from feeding wildlife
- Feeding is harmful to wildlife
- Leads to habituation and nuisance wildlife; and spreads disease

If feeding is resulting in threats to public safety or nuisance wildlife issues

- Public safety officers may issue citations
- Consider implementing a no feeding bylaw for further enforcement options.



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## Young Wildlife

ACOs may receive calls from the public about young animals who appear to be abandoned or orphaned. Make sure to fully confirm the status before removing the animal.

### Abandoned

- Very rarely happens unless young is fatally injured, deformed, or otherwise extremely compromised and unlikely to survive.
- If the animal is suffering you may humanely euthanize if appropriate and authorized to do so.



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## Young Wildlife

### Orphaned

- Very rare; adults will leave young alone for extended periods
- Parents are often foraging. Just because the parents have not been seen, do not assume the young are orphaned
- Often the result of the mother being killed by a vehicle
- Confirm before transporting to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator that an animal is **truly orphaned**.
- The public often report or attempt to rehab animals that are NOT orphaned
- **Leaving the animals alone or returning them to where they were found are often the best options**

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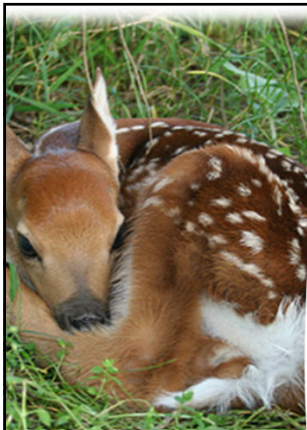
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## Deer Fawns

- Does leave fawns alone for hours at a time
- Fawns are rarely orphaned
- 99% of the time, you should simply leave the fawn alone
- If absolutely necessary (in a garage, very developed area, etc.), you may move it to a nearby wooded area
- Do not take possession unless given permission by MassWildlife

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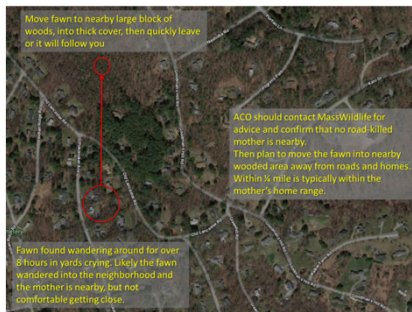
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## Deer Fawns



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## Coyote and Fox Dens

Coyotes and Fox often den under sheds/porches/decks  
(Not a public safety threat.)

- Disturb the den sites and they will move young to new den
- Human presence & harassment
  - Ammonia-soaked rags in den
  - Radio left playing
- After animals have moved, eliminate potential den sites
  - Block off accessible places using:
    - Small gauge fencing, wire mesh, hardware cloth, or other suitable building materials



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## Disposal of Deceased Wildlife

- **If deceased wildlife NEEDS to be removed from an area:**
  - wildlife can be bagged and disposed of in trash.
  - Wear gloves/use caution
  - often dead wildlife can be left alone to allow scavengers to break down.
- **On Private property** owners are responsible for disposal of carcasses on their property (If unwilling, they can hire a PAC agent)
- **Road killed animals** – DPW/MassDOT/Hwy Dept.
- **Salvage of road-killed deer**
  - If the person wishing to salvage the deer is not the person that hit the deer, they first need to contact EPOs to get permission to salvage it
- ACO's may record the incident with a deer mortality book or incident report, but do NOT have the authority to permit a person to salvage a deer. Any person salvaging the deer must go to a MassWildlife Office to get an official seal

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## Protecting Pets

- House cats – keep inside or closely supervise
- Cats and dogs are seen as prey and/or competition by some wildlife
- Human presence is key
- Keep leashed
- Have under excellent voice command
- Dogs on runs or have electric collar/fencing are vulnerable – fences do not keep wildlife out



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## Protecting livestock, chickens, & bees

- Many species in MA see livestock, bees, and particularly chickens as potential food items



Adequately protecting these items is the only way to prevent damage by wildlife

- Securely store livestock feed
- Minimize dispersal of distributed feed
- Build and maintain secure fencing (Use electric fencing to prevent damage by bears)
- Use effective guard animals – dogs, llamas, etc.

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## Eastern Coyote

**The mere presence of a coyote in a yard is not a public safety threat**

- Intelligent, inquisitive, observant, & adaptable
- Daytime activity is normal behavior
- Sightings of coyotes in neighborhoods and yards are common
- There is minimal risk toward people from healthy coyotes
- Coyotes are found in yards and neighborhoods because of human-associated food sources
- Coyotes will attack dogs and cats

### Solutions:

- Remove and secure all food sources
- Important to keep all dogs on a leash and supervised when outside, keep cats inside
- Haze coyotes in yards
- Yell/scream, make loud noises (air horn/pots and pans), physically chase from yard, spray with hose, throw small objects, make them feel unwelcome



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## Addressing Issues with Bears

- Bear "problems" are caused by people providing food to bears
  - The problems will NOT go away as long as the food remains
- Remove and secure all food around homes
  - Store garbage in a garage or shed and secure dumpsters
  - Don't feed pets outside or strays, secure compost and all food sources
  - Bird feeders are the #1 food attractant for bears around homes
    - no safe time of year or day to have bird feeders out



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## Wild Turkeys

### Issues:

- Most problems are a direct result from intentional or unintentional feeding
- Feeding causes unnaturally large concentrations and habituates turkeys to humans
- Behavioral issues - chasing cars, aggressive interactions with humans
- General nuisance issues - noise, fecal material, lawn/garden damage, pecking at windows

### Solutions:

- Do Not feed turkeys
- Haze/harass early and often
- Use visual deterrents
- DO NOT run away from aggressive birds
- Cover highly reflective surfaces



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## Report observations of dead wild birds

MassWildlife is collecting information on wild birds to monitor possible outbreaks of Avian Influenza. We are particularly interested in sick/dead seabirds washing up along coastal areas. Please complete this form and include a photo if possible.

### When to report:

- If you find sick or dead seabirds (i.e., gulls, terns, cormorants, sea ducks)
- If you find 5 or more wild birds of other species at a single location

This form is only for reporting wild birds. [Click here to report sick or dead domestic poultry](#)



Mass.gov/  
reportbirds

- PLEASE make sure to use proper PPE when picking up and sick or deceased birds use gloves, goggles (if in wet environment), double bag, secure trash barrel, handwashing, proper PPE disposal/ disinfecting

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## Contacts

- Local police department
- Officers should respond to public safety threats
- MA Environmental Police
- Radio room: 1-800-632-8075
- 24 hours/day, 7 days/week



### MassWildlife Offices

- Field Headquarters (Westborough)  
508-389-6300
- Northeast District (Ayer)  
978-772-2145
- Southeast District (Bourne)  
508-759-3406
- Central District (West Boylston)  
508-835-3607
- CT Valley District (Belchertown)  
413-323-7632
- Western District (Dalton)  
413-684-1646

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Let's take a minute and review guide page 13

## Training Guide Pause

### WILDLIFE

Mass Wildlife has statutory authority to enforce MGL Chapter 131 & 131A, so ACOs need to obtain authorization to address most wildlife issues. Below are some examples of wildlife calls and a response. Is the response one that the ACO would need to get MassWildlife permission for prior?

Scenario	Response	YES	NO
There is a report of a fox that bit a person in their backyard.	The ACO captures the fox with a rabies pole, contacts the AI and brings the fox to a vet for euthanasia and testing.		
There is a call about a baby deer found at a playground.	The ACO captures the baby deer and since it appears to be underweight, they bring it to a local rehabber.		
A sick coyote is seen near the train station, it appears to have a skin condition	The ACO sets a trap, captures the coyote, and brings it to a veterinarian for treatment.		
There is a call about a hawk that has been sitting on a fence in a backyard. The owner is concerned about her small dogs.	The ACO goes out to check on the situation and they spot a bird feeder also in the yard. The ACO gives the homeowner information about why feeding wildlife can be harmful.		
An individual calls about stating that they have a groundhog in a trap and want it removed.	The ACO takes the groundhog to the town forest and releases it.		

What is an ACO's best tool when it comes to responding to calls about Wildlife?

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## WRAP UP

### Questions?

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