

# Wildlife Safety



Massanutten Resort is home to a variety of wildlife. While we want you to enjoy the wildlife around the area, the following information is very important for your safety and for the well-being of the animals. Important Safety Information Provided by our friends at The Progressive Animal Welfare Society

When wild animals begin to depend on humans for food, their foraging skills may be diminished. When young wild animals are taught to depend on humans for food, they may become less experienced at foraging and consequently less likely to survive.

Wild animals that are used to being fed by humans commonly lose their fear of people. Animals that are unafraid of people will approach them for food, and are sometimes mistaken as rabid and killed. They also become easy targets for kids with BB guns and others who mean them harm. An instinctive wariness of people is important to a wild animal's survival.

The food fed to animals by humans is inadequate nutritionally and can cause serious health problems for the animals, especially when they are young and still developing. Just like humans, most urban animals need a variety of foods in their diet, and if they fill up on "junk" food, they will not get the nutrients they need to stay healthy. Most humans will feed animals food that they have in their house – people food – which bears no resemblance to what the animals eat in the wild.

Animals (like humans!) are opportunistic and will go for the most convenient food source available. Who doesn't like a free meal? When food is readily available, animals will gather in abnormally large numbers. This means that if one animal in the group has an illness or disease, it can spread throughout the group. Many wild animals do not interact with others of their own species except during mating season and when raising their young. This is one way to limit diseases among a wild population. By gathering these animals together in unnatural groups, these diseases can spread much more quickly and can destroy a large number of animals.

Reproduction rates may also be affected when an artificial food source is readily available. In the wild, the number of animals being born is often directly related to the amount of natural food available. The number of animals surviving will also depend on how much food is available. This is nature's way of keeping a balance and making sure there are not too many animals in one area. When an unnatural food supply becomes available, animals may produce more young and soon there may be more ani-

mals living in the area than what the natural food sources can support. If that food source is no longer available, animals may starve to death.

Feeding migratory animals such as ducks, geese, and some passerines such as hummingbirds can interfere with the animal's awareness of seasonal changes in natural food supplies which tell the animal that it is time to migrate. This has been a large problem with Canada geese in some parts of the country, including Washington. Human food sources are so plentiful that some Canada geese no longer migrate but continue to reproduce to the point where they have been removed or killed because they have become such a nuisance.

A common phone call that we receive at the PAWS Wildlife Center is from people whose neighbors have been feeding wild animals. Often, they have become an incredible nuisance and the caller wants to kill or remove them. Many people do not think about the neighborhood impact when they start feeding wildlife. Wild animals do not usually discriminate between one human and another and will often start pestering other neighbors. They may also cause damage to homes and property because they expect to be fed and have lost their fear of people. Please take the extra step to dispose of your trash in the proper receptacle to ensure that Massanutten Resort remains a safe and enjoyable environment for both our guests, and our wildlife!



