

Please Don't Feed the Animals



One of the great things about living in Wildwood is you are close to nature. The natural, forested areas of our City provide ideal habitats for wild animals of all kinds—from deer and coyotes to raccoons and squirrels. Although all this wildlife outside your backdoor provides tremendous opportunities to view animals, people are sometimes tempted to put food out for wild animals in order to get up-close sightings. That is rarely a good idea.

While the Missouri Department of Conservation encourages people to fill bird-feeders for birds, they warn that leaving food

for other wild animals like deer, coyotes, raccoons and geese can do the animals more harm than good. Below are four reasons the Department of Conservation lists for why residents should follow the familiar admonition "Please Don't Feed the Animals."

First of all, **it's not good for them**. Non-domestic animals have complex digestive systems that can't properly digest the kind of additives found in the kind of processed foods people often leave out for them. When wild animals consume large quantities of these types of foods, they may not get the right balance of energy and nutrition they would get from the natural foods they would otherwise eat. This nutritional imbalance can make it difficult for them to survive the winter.



Second, this artificial provision of food **changes animals' natural feeding behavior**. It turns them into beggars; and even if the food provided is nutritious, it changes their natural feeding habits and patterns. It can change their movement patterns and cause them to concentrate in higher than normal numbers around a feeding site. This increased population around a site can then increase their chance of spreading disease.



The third reason is because it **creates conflicts between wildlife and humans**. It's actually good for wildlife to have a healthy fear of people. When that is lost and animals see people as a ticket to a free lunch, they can begin displaying aggressive behavior. Also, wildlife attracted to an area by supplemental food won't only eat the food you leave out for them. They will snack on anything else that interests them. A high concentration of deer near a feeding site, for instance, will also tend to munch on other vegetation, such as your or your neighbor's landscaping plants.

The last reason not to leave food out for wild animals is it **can attract unwanted pests**. You might put out food so as to get extra, close-up glimpses of raccoons or squirrels, but mice and rats see the food as an invitation to them also. They will gladly gobble up what you've put out, and might just decide areas of your house or garage would make a great place for them to live.



So do yourself and wild animals a favor. Enjoy watching them in their natural habitat, but don't let your soft heart and love of them entice you into doing something that is detrimental in the long run. Remember, when it comes to wildlife, don't feed the animals.