In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some are concerned, others are interested in learning more. There is a program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals called Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts. LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: A PROGRAM OF THE MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

**Mice and Rats: How to Humanely Keep Out These Common Intruders**

Exclusion techniques are the same for all of these mice. House mice prefer to live in comfortable areas between walls, behind appliances, and in unused drawers, and often the only signs of them are gnawed food items or their small droppings. The size and shape of grains of rice. Native mice often seek the shelter of homes in early fall or winter. Mice are omnivorous, preferring grains and seeds, and can live without water if the food they eat is moist.

With both mouse and rat problems, it is important to locate and eliminate their food and shelter sources and then permanently exclude them.

As with mice, there are two kinds of rats that cause most problems for people, the Norwegian, or brown, rat and the black, or roof, rat. Norway rats are common in dense areas of human settlement and live in 18-inch-deep burrows underground or in lumber piles or similar environments. In the United States, black rats are most often found in coastal areas of the South, Southeast, and West. Black rats are excellent climbers and live higher off the ground, usually in the upper levels of buildings or nesting in trees or vines. Rats are good swimmers and jumpers, capable of leaping three vertical and four horizontal feet. Like mice, rats are omnivorous, eating a variety of plant and animal foods. Rats do need access to a water supply. Signs of rats in and around your home can include three quarter-to-half-inch droppings, gnawed holes in basements or door frames, and burrows (although these can be confused with burrows of squirrels and chipmunks).

**Possible Conflicts and Solutions**

The most common problems resulting from rats and mice are contamination of human food sources from urine and feces, and gnawing damage to electrical wiring. With both mouse and rat problems, it is important to locate and eliminate their food and shelter sources and then permanently exclude them. Here are some suggestions:

- Clean kitchen areas well, clean up spills quickly, and store food in the refrigerator or in sealed metal, glass, or heavy plastic containers. A dilute bleach solution will get rid of any scent trails that are present.
- If possible, human or pet food should not be stored outside, and if it is in a garage or basement, it should be placed in sturdy plastic, glass, or metal containers. Always feed pets indoors and thoroughly clean up the area afterward.
- Trimming and clearing away brush and debris within 18 inches of house or building foundations can help eliminate protective cover and expose the animals’ burrows and

and animal foods, including garbage, insects, rodents, rabbits, birds, deer, carrion, and even berries and fruits. Coyotes also play an important role in controlling rodent populations.

Coyotes breed during February or March in a relatively short period of time. Coyotes are the name given to these animals by the Iroquois, a native American tribe.

Coyotes are fully independent at about nine months, and many canid species, it is important to realize that the widespread killing of them at problem sites is not an effective solution for, as long as there is viable habitat, the coyote will continue to live in and around the area. Generally, coyotes shy away from human activity and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.

**Possible Conflicts and Solutions**

Generally, coyotes are extremely shy and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.

**General Information**

Mice and rats are widespread throughout North America. Both rats and mice are nocturnal. Mice can enter holes the size of a dime, and rats can enter holes the size of a quarter. When dealing with these creatures, it is important to realize that the widespread killing of them at problem sites is not an effective solution for, as long as there is viable habitat, the coyote will continue to live in and around the area. Generally, coyotes shy away from human activity and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.

**Possible Conflicts and Solutions**

Generally, coyotes are extremely shy and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.

**General Information**

Mice and rats are widespread throughout North America. Both rats and mice are nocturnal. Mice can enter holes the size of a dime, and rats can enter holes the size of a quarter. When dealing with these creatures, it is important to realize that the widespread killing of them at problem sites is not an effective solution for, as long as there is viable habitat, the coyote will continue to live in and around the area. Generally, coyotes shy away from human activity and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.

**Possible Conflicts and Solutions**

Generally, coyotes are extremely shy and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, however, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have even been known to come up the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Mice and rats are all-too-familiar guests in and around human homes and industrial areas. Killing is not humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with these little creatures.
fined in well-built cages or pens each evening. Historically, trapping has never been a method for managing coyote populations in Massachusetts. In the past few decades, there have only been two land trapping seasons for taking coyotes. Hunting is more commonly used in the state for killing coyotes; the coyote-hunting season lasts four months. If coyotes should pose a threat to public health or safety, the law allows for the use of prohibited traps for capturing those problem animals. Because conflicts most often occur in suburban areas, trapping should be conducted responsibly. A special permit is required.

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife mission:
The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.

Illustration by Chris Hill

Public-Health Concerns
Like all warm-blooded animals, coyotes may contract rabies. If you suspect that an animal has rabies, contact your local animal-control officer.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA’s Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, or e-mail lww@mspca.org.

Live trapping is another option for eliminating mice and rats, but it should be used only by a last resort. The reasons for this are that trapping can break up family groups, trapped-and-relocated animals can find hard to survive in new surroundings, and, unless conditions are made less appealing, new animals will simply move into the home or building to take the place of those caught in traps. If all other efforts to deter mice or rats fail, humane box traps (Hav-a-Hart is a common brand name) can often be found at grocery and hardware stores. These traps catch mice without harm and enable them to be released elsewhere. Trap and release mice only in warm weather, and release mice in an area close by the home or building where they were caught (this increases their chances of surviving both the elements and unfamiliar territory). Traps should be placed in areas where mice are present, and close to walls, since mice like to travel along a wall or barrier. The traps can be baited with appealing substances, such as peanut butter, popcorn, or sunflower seeds. Home-made traps can also be made by tilting a small bathroom or kitchen wastebasket on its side with bait in the bottom of it and a ladder of bricks or books on the outside leading up to the top of it. Mice are likely to climb up the ladder, slide or jump into the bottom to get the bait, and not be able to climb back out. Any traps should be checked every few hours. Traps and wastebaskets can be cleaned with a mild bleach solution (1:30) and used again.

Killing is not a humane, long-term, effective, or economically sensible solution to problems with mice and rats. As with most problems of animals in buildings, remember that unless proper exclusion, habitat management, and sanitary measures are taken, it probably won’t be long before new animals move in to take advantage of the available habitat. Poison and sticky glue traps, which are especially inhumane, causing intense suffering of target nontarget animals, and should not be used. They can take days to kill and often cause an agonizing death.

Public-Health Concerns
Both mice and rats can carry a number of diseases that are transmittable to humans, such as hantavirus and salmonellosis. It is important to clean with a mild bleach solution areas that have come into contact with mouse or rat droppings and to see a doctor if you are ever bitten by a rat.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA’s Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, or e-mail lww@mspca.org.