

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The Little Known Fisher: Resolving Conflicts

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

Fisher sightings are on the rise, yet actual conflicts have been minimal. By understanding the fisher and by following a few simple steps, you can reduce the likelihood of experiencing a conflict with a fisher.

General Information

Fishers, or “fisher cats” as they are sometimes called, are not a member of the feline family at all. In fact, they are the largest members of the weasel family. Their physical appearance is similar to that of a weasel, long and slender with short legs and a bushy tail. Males can weigh up to 16 pounds, and females usually top the scale at a mere 6 pounds. From head to tail, males grow to be approximately 3 feet long while females tend to grow to an estimated 2 feet long. The tails of both sexes account for approximately 1/3 of the animals' length.

Fishers were hunted to a point of total elimination in Massachusetts by the end of the 19th century. Over the past few decades, fishers have been slowly making a comeback and can now be found in most parts of the state.

Fishers breed from February to March. Within 12 – 14 months an average litter of 3 kits is born. The kits are raised by the female until they are approximately 5 months old, at which time the kits disperse in search of their own territory.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Although active year-round, it is unlikely that you will have the chance to see a fisher, even if for only a split second. Fishers are timid and elusive and will generally try to avoid conflicts with humans.

Fishers have erroneously earned a reputation for being vicious. They are curious and playful, yet shy. They usually never attack an animal larger than a rabbit. Their main diet consists of mice, voles, squirrels, fruits and berries, and the occasional carrion. They are also one of the few predators of porcupine. Pet owners should not allow their cats or small dogs to be outdoors unsupervised, as the fisher may prey upon them. Make sure you are not inadvertently attracting fishers by leaving out open trash containers, feeding pets outside, or leaving spilled bird seed on the ground, which can attract small rodents that then can attract fishers.

If a fisher does come into your yard, using scare tactics is your best option. Loud noises such as clapping your hands or yelling at them is usually enough to drive them away. Spraying fishers with a garden hose will also send them on their way. Special devices can be

purchased that attach to your standard garden hose and act as a motion sensor. When an animal triggers the motion sensor, the device activates the sprinkler spraying the animal with water. This device is convenient because you do not have to be present when an animal enters your yard for it to work.

If you do see fishers in your neighborhood, it is a good idea to discuss these solutions with your neighbors as well.

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 your questions to LivingWithWildlife@mspca.org.

