



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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## **Top Wildlife Myths: How Well Do You Know Your Neighbors?**

(August 1, 2007) -- With kids spending more time in their yards, at camp, and in parks and playgrounds in August, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) wants to set the record straight with the truth about the most popular wildlife myths.

According to Laura Simon, field director of urban wildlife for The HSUS, “These popular myths have been around forever, passed on from generation to generation. We are hoping that educating the next generation will ultimately result in a better co-existence between humans and wildlife.”

### **Myth # 1: Feeding bread to geese and ducks is a wonderful family activity.**

**Fact:** Bread is bad for birds because it offers no nutritional value whatsoever. Severe health problems, including a debilitating condition called “Angel Wing” is caused by bread. Birds have actually starved to death on a diet of bread. Hand-feeding leads to dependency because ducklings and goslings won’t learn how to find native foods on their own, and some birds become aggressive about being fed --- all of which leads to a tragic outcome.

### **Myth # 2: If you find a fawn alone, she has been orphaned.**

**Fact:** It is actually very common to see fawns alone because the mother will “park” her babies in one place and only visit two to three times a day to avoid attracting predators. Until the fawn is four weeks old, you will rarely see the mother. Instead, the fawn relies on camouflage and lying still for protection during this vulnerable period.

### **Myth # 3: If you touch a baby bird the parents will abandon him.**

**Fact:** Birds have a limited sense of smell, but are strongly bonded to their chicks. They will not abandon them if handled by humans. The best thing humans can do if a baby bird falls from its nest is to put him or her right back in the nest. The parents will return to feed them. Watch carefully: They will feed their chicks several times an hour, from dawn ‘til dusk.

### **Myth # 4: If you see a raccoon during the day, he must be rabid.**

**Fact:** Raccoons are opportunistic and will appear whenever food is around. Although they are normally nocturnal, it is not uncommon to see raccoons during the day when pet

food is outside, especially in spring and summer when mom raccoons have high energy demands due to nursing their young cubs. Only if the animal is acting disoriented or sick, such as circling, staggering, or screeching -- in addition to being seen by day -- should a local animal control officer be contacted.

**Myth # 5: If you get close to a skunk, you'll get sprayed.**

**Fact:** It is actually extremely difficult for a person to get sprayed by a skunk. These animals only spray to defend themselves, such as when a dog runs up and grabs them. But because they cannot "reload" very fast, skunks do not waste their odiferous weapon. Instead, they will stamp their front feet as a warning to get you to back off.

**Myth # 6: Bats get tangled up in your hair if they fly near you.**

**Fact:** The last place a bat wants to be is in your hair! They navigate using a complex sonar-like system called echolocation which allows them to "see" their world with fine precision. The misconception about bats flying in hair is based on a bat's swooping flight patterns when they get trapped in a confined space, like a house. Bats have a long wingspan; the reason they swoop is not to fly into your hair, but to stay airborne.

**Myth # 7: Cats belong outdoors and it is not fair to keep them inside the house.**

**Fact:** Letting cats roam outside subjects them to perils of the outdoor world, particularly being hit by cars. Indoor cats live a healthier and longer life. Outdoor cats, even well-fed ones, spend much time mangling and killing wildlife like ground-nesting baby rabbits, chipmunks and baby birds that have not yet learned to fly. Wildlife and cats are at risk when people let their cats out.

**Myth # 8: Opossums are vicious and rabid.**

**Fact:** Opossums are resistant to rabies most likely due to their low body temperature. Opossums are also harmless, benign creatures that can hardly defend themselves. Their hissing, teeth-baring, and drooling is not a sign of rabies but rather a bluff to scare off potential predators. When their "I'm scary" act doesn't work, they play dead.

**Myth # 9: Canada geese stick around because they forgot how to migrate.**

**Fact:** Geese who live in one place year-round do so through no fault of their own. They are descendants of captive-bred geese introduced by wildlife agencies over 50 years ago to create "opportunities" for hunters. Geese were also released by people who thought they would simply look nice on their ponds. As a result, transplanted geese never learned to migrate from their parents, and thrive in our suburban landscapes.