

How To Handle Wild Neighbors

As a follow-up to the May 14, 2024 Biannual HOA meeting, the following is the information provided by the Virginia Dept of Wildlife Resources (DWR) addressing wildlife in our environment:

- **Regarding Snakes.** Our DWR representative stated he would never recommend killing a snake as they are an important part of the ecosystem. Most snakes are harmless and, much like bats, provide a valuable service around your home in the way of pest control (snakes control rodents, bats control insects). In fact, the presence of snakes around your property or in your house may indicate a rodent problem. There are only 3 venomous snakes in Virginia, the copperhead being the one to avoid in our area. The Dept of Wildlife Resources website has some basic information on how to co-exist with snakes and snake removal if that's the direction you want to go. If the snake is outside your home there really isn't too much to worry about, but if they are inside then he would recommend a removal service. The Virginia Herpetological Society could also probably point you in the right direction for prevention, expectations, and what to do when you encounter a snake. The Herp site has an expansive in-depth identification section on snakes, including photos.

Our resource on snakes is here:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/nuisance/snakes/> and it links to a great ID place here: <https://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/>.

- **Fox and Coyotes.** Those two can be confused and it's more likely a coyote would eat a small dog or cat than a fox would. **However**, coyotes don't really see small dogs and cats as their primary prey source and incidents remain low. The best thing to do for cats/small dogs, is keep them indoors. Keep small dogs on leash when walking them and keep them close and never leave a small dog unattended outside even within a fenced yard. The other best thing to do is prevent foxes and coyotes from getting too used to human presence which would increase the chance of negative encounters. This is done by not feeding them, and reinforcing their natural fear of humans by hazing them if you see them.

Seeing a coyote or fox in the daylight is not a sign of anything wrong. Wildlife typically knows how to avoid humans and it's normal for wildlife to be out during the day.

However, if there has been feeding or frequently repeated visitations diminishing human avoidance this can create an unnecessary elevated risk. Report feeding, **intentional or unintentional** to the crime line: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/contact/>

More information can be found here:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/nuisance/coyotes/>
<https://urbancoyotereseach.com/>
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/wildlife/coyote>.

- **As for Deer.** Apart from fencing, there are only two options: 1) spray a deterrent; 2) and hunting.

Spray can get costly because repeated application is needed as well as switching of brands (as deer get used to it). He cautions that spraying of deterrents has limited longevity and isn't 100% successful.

Hunting deer is not an option within the community.

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Granted, the problem will not go away entirely, even with hunting. The deer population is overabundant in Prince William County already, so any hunting would have to be done annually and would not work as a one and done season. If anyone is interested in a deeper dive into this topic the specialist would be happy to discuss it at length.

- **Feeding Wildlife.** If anyone is leaving food out on the landscape, *that* is potentially a wildlife feeding violation. It is impossible to not feed wildlife when food is left out. If there is known feeding you will want to contact the crimeline: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/conservation-police/wildlife-violation/>. Dept of Wildlife Resources doesn't regulate feral cats as that's more of a domestic situation and concerned residents would need to reach out to animal control.

- **Animal Control.**

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