

OVERVIEW

This activity encourages students to consider how the choices they make in daily life can impact urban wildlife positively and negatively. Students will discuss solutions to conflicts that can arise when humans encounter wildlife in urban environments. Solutions will include goals to **coexist**, living together peacefully in a shared space with urban wildlife.

MATERIALS

- Guidelines for Coexistence (page 4)
- Dilemma cards
- Art supplies (optional for indoor facilitation)
- Chalk and access to natural items like twigs, dry leaves, and pine cones (optional for outdoor facilitation)

Facilitators: Download and read through the *Wildlife Basic Information Packet* to be familiar with and comfortable discussing the urban wildlife introduced in this activity.



ACTIVITY

PART A:

Begin with a discussion about what it means to **coexist**. Ask students to create a definition for **coexistence** as it relates to their immediate family members—parents, siblings, extended family, etc.

- How do you choose to **coexist** when conflict arises?
- How do you **coexist** at school and in the community?
- How can these **coexistence** principles extend to urban wildlife?
 - Share with students the Guidelines for Coexistence. How many match the previous principles students created and discussed?

THEME

Personal choices affect how we **coexist** with urban wildlife.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze conflicts that arise during human-wildlife encounters from multiple points of view.
- Develop solutions.
- Explore ways to encourage others to **coexist** with urban wildlife.

SUBJECTS

Biodiversity and humans, ecosystem relationships, human impacts on earth systems, integrating engineering or technology to **coexist**

SKILLS

Engaging in evidence-based discussions, recognizing cause and effect patterns, developing solutions

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND MATERIALS

Suggested for facilitator

- Wildlife Basic Information Packet
- WildlifeNYC website nyc.gov/wildlife

As a group, read aloud the Dilemma #1 scenario below. Guide the students through the dilemma; identify problems and competing interests.

Dilemma #1: A forester is ordered to completely remove a tree because it is at immediate risk of falling. The tree is located next to a park path that is used continuously throughout the day by pedestrians and bicycle riders. The forester arrives on scene and notices the tree has a family of raccoons with a den inside. What should the forester do?

Discuss possible solutions and collectively try to agree on a response.

If inspiration is needed, possible actions are suggested below.

1. Try to scare raccoons out with loud noises or water spray from a garden hose before removing the tree.
2. Proceed with the task without delay. Park patrons need to be kept safe.
3. Call a supervisor and tell them about the raccoon family. Tell the supervisor the tree can't be removed because raccoons are vicious and scary.
4. Call a supervisor and tell them the path should be closed with caution signs. Raccoons could then stay in their den, and park patrons won't be near the tree if it falls.

Once the group has reached a decision on Dilemma #1, consider the situations below and proceed with another group discussion.

- Pretend you are the mother raccoon living inside the tree. What are your main concerns?
- Thinking about the raccoon's options, does this change how you think the forester should act?
- As a forester, what would you do if you found a robin's nest with young chicks in the tree slated for removal?
- As a forester, what would you do if there was an active red-tailed hawk nest in the tree?

If student responses are changing with the species, ask the class to discuss why their course of action is different. Re-evaluate if the initial action response should be different.

PART B:

Work in small groups of three to six students. Each group chooses a dilemma card randomly. Read the dilemma and discuss outcomes as a group.

The group must agree upon one solution and then create either visual artwork or act out a scene, song, or spoken poem to present their solution. Give students adequate time to work before presenting their solutions to each other.

Allow the audience to ask questions after each presentation.

Additional questions the facilitator can ask:

- Has anyone on the team encountered this dilemma before?
- Does the audience agree with the presented solution? Why or why not?
- How easy was it for the group to agree on a dilemma solution? What were some of the other solutions you considered? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of those solutions.
- What, if any, arguments did you use to persuade team members to agree? What made you think the solution you chose was the best possible one?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Focusing on the behavior changes presented as dilemma solutions, create a **coexistence** pledge for your local community or school. Explore how students can encourage others to **coexist** with urban wildlife, and create action steps to support their urban wildlife **coexistence** pledge.

Examples of action steps could include:

- Avoid feeding wildlife
- Pick up trash and litter to keep wildlife habitats safe and clean
- Keep pets leashed and supervised
- Appreciate wildlife from a safe distance

Ask each student to write down their own actions. Then as a group share ideas together and vote on the top five. With the pledge complete, ask students to create a poster with the pledge and action steps. Share it throughout the community, asking teachers, friends, family, and/or neighbors to read and sign the pledge. Display the pledge and signatures.

GUIDELINES FOR COEXISTENCE

Coexisting with wildlife in urban environments requires us to be aware of the species living among us and to alter our behavior accordingly. The following are basic guidelines for **coexisting** with urban wildlife.

1. View all wildlife from a distance. Wildlife are exactly that—wild. The best way to ensure both your safety and the animal's is to keep your distance.
2. Do not feed wildlife. Wildlife can become a nuisance if people unknowingly or deliberately feed them. Feeding causes wildlife to lose their natural hunting instincts and approach humans for food.
3. Store all food and garbage in animal-proof containers. Urban wildlife are very resourceful, and will find ways into unsecured trash bins and pet food containers.
4. Protect your pets. Walk dogs on a leash and keep cats inside for safety. Also make sure pets' vaccinations are up-to-date.
5. Seal potential den locations. Block access to areas of your home, garage, or outdoor shed where wildlife might make their homes.
6. When you find healthy young or baby wildlife, remember: If you care, leave it there. Just like human parents, mom and dad are usually close by and can give the best care for their young.
7. Wildlife can be seen day or night. Some nocturnal species like raccoons, coyotes, and opossums can be seen out during the day. This does not mean they are dangerous or are carrying rabies.

Print single sided and cut out cards

Dilemma #1

A next door neighbor leaves cans of cat food out for strays that live on your block. One night while walking home you notice a raccoon eating the cat food. You walk by. The raccoon hisses and growls at you.

What should you do? How can you respectfully talk to your neighbor about what you saw?

Dilemma #2

In your neighborhood you saw a hawk catch and eat a rat. It was thrilling to see a hawk hunting. Later on, you were told to be careful outside because your building's Super left out poison to kill the rats. Today you saw a dead rat out front.

What might happen if another animal eats the dead rat? What can you do to keep wildlife safe and your building rat-free?

Dilemma #3

At the dog run there is a large wooden platform. Dog owners see young skunks come out from underneath the platform with their parents in the evenings. The skunks are nocturnal. They like to find food at night.

How can dog owners and skunks both use the dog run and surrounding area safely?

Dilemma #4

A friend has a backyard garden facing a large forested area. Your friend tells stories about deer walking into the garden. They like to eat the flowers. Your friend decides to leave food out for the deer, like apples and stale bread, so the deer will not eat their garden.

Is this a good idea? Why or why not? Can you suggest another solution?

Print single sided and cut out cards

Dilemma #5

An empty field was transformed into a baseball diamond. During night games, people are seeing what looks like a stray dog walking around. Some try to give it dog treats. The animal keeps its distance, but it is curious. An adult says it must be a coyote that was living in the empty field. If it is a coyote, what can you do to keep it and your friends safe?

Dilemma #6

You are having a picnic and playing in the park. You leave and look for a place to throw away your garbage. The nearest trash cans are overflowing with garbage. People keep placing more on top, and it is spilling all over. You already see a mouse eating at the bottom of one can. What will you decide to do with your garbage?
How can this mess be avoided in the future?

Dilemma #7

It is early summer, and you like to play soccer with friends at the park on Saturday mornings. This time of the year, the field is filled with Canada geese eating and pooping. It is so annoying! Sometimes the birds hiss if you get too close. If young goslings are nearby, the geese are even meaner. What can you do so that you can still enjoy playing soccer in the park and the geese have a home?

Dilemma #8

Your school is expanding and plans to add a new building in an empty lot next to your current school. A small field with trees has to be cleared before construction can begin. You know wildlife live there. You have seen birds, raccoons, opossums, and squirrels.
How can the school expand and also provide space for wildlife to live?

Print single sided and cut out cards

Dilemma #9

Hiking with your friend through a park, you spot a baby deer on the ground by itself. You look around for its mother, but do not find her. The fawn also doesn't move at all. Your friend thinks the fawn is hurt or lost, and wants to pick it up and bring it to an animal care center. What would you do?

Dilemma #10

As you eat lunch in the park, you look up and see a raccoon walking along a path. A couple nearby also sees it. They begin to argue about what to do. One says seeing a raccoon during the day means it is sick, and believes that they should call 911. The other says it probably is just hungry, and suggests giving it potato chips. They ask you what you think. What would you tell them to do?

Dilemma #11

A pair of red-tailed hawks have built a nest on a window ledge on the top floor of your school. Some parents heard about it and think the nest should be removed. They don't think it's a natural place to nest, and they believe the hawks will make a mess. What should happen with the nest and what would you tell the parents?

Dilemma #12

A family of coyotes has lived in your neighborhood for years. This year your neighbors are asking the mayor to remove them. They feel they are a danger. Do you agree? What do you say to your neighbors?