



# Wildlife Today

A Publication of Animal Ridders Inc. "Wildlife Management Specialists"

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**Owner Margie Darling atop a beaver lodge in Lagrange Kentucky**

## What We Do At Animal Ridders

Animal Ridders was founded in 1991. A lot of people ask, "Just what is it you do?" Obviously these people have never encountered wildlife creating havoc in their lives, waking them up at all hours of the night running around in their attics. They have never experienced the skunk under their crawl space spraying and turning their home into an unlivable place to be, or the mole destroying their finely manicured lawn that they have put so much time and money into. We cannot forget the chimneys where raccoons like to climb into and out of to live. Why do they do this? They sleep on the damper because it is nice and dry and close to the heat. It is also a great place to raise babies because they stay safe, warm, and dry!

What about those beavers? With a dead fur market and the prices of fur so low, no one traps them anymore and they are taking over. There is nothing like walking out to look at your beautiful lake or stream and see something has cut down or totally removed some of your valuable trees overnight, or dammed up the creek so high it is overflowing into your lawn. In the lakes, they

stuff up the culverts that drain the lakes with their own version of a dam which causes the water to rise and flow over the main dam. In sixteen years of business, I have seen a huge increase in these and more wildlife problems.

Sometimes this work is best left to the professionals, as you will read in some of the following articles. What we do at Animal Ridders is nuisance wildlife management. We remove the animals humanely and safely whenever possible with live catch traps. Live caught animals are relocated to a more suitable environment. After removing animals from homes, we can do repairs or cap chimneys to prevent re-entry. We remove any wildlife that has presented itself to homeowners and business owners alike. This includes moles, flying squirrels, gray squirrels, raccoons, opossums, groundhogs, chipmunks, voles, beaver, coyotes, fox, feral cats, bats, birds, etc.. If you are experiencing any wildlife problems, give us a call. We will be glad to help.

-Article By Margie Darling

# The Great Skunk Encounter

It was 1992. I had only been in business about a year. It was a cool fall night in Owl Creek neighborhood; one of those nice nights people leave windows open to air out the homes and get fresh air. I got a call from a woman in tears at 7:30 a.m. All she could say was, "Skunk! Please come immediately." When I was driving down the road I passed the house up. I knew this because the skunk smell was so bad I could smell it inside my truck with the windows rolled up. When I got there, this is how the story went as she told it:

Something had been digging up the lawn at night for a couple weeks. (Raccoons and skunks sometimes do extensive damage to lawns, usually in the fall, digging for grub worms. Since they are nocturnal and the damage happens overnight, a lot of people are baffled at what is doing the damage since they never view the animals doing it.) The Mrs. got up to use the bathroom at around 1:00 a.m. She looked out the window and saw a skunk digging up the front lawn. She ran back into the bedroom and abruptly woke her husband and told him there was a skunk tearing up the yard and to do something! With that, he ran into the garage and grabbed a shovel. He proceeded to go out to the front yard and hit the skunk with a shovel. (I am thinking to myself, "Now it don't take a country boy to know you don't just walk up and smack a skunk with a shovel.") Now keep in mind that a skunk has a good aim at ten feet, and this man was on the end of a four foot shovel. Needless to say, he got the full load. After getting sprayed, he ran into the HOUSE and took off his clothes. Their windows upstairs were open. The kids woke up crying, coughing, and with their eyes burning. Then, ten minutes later, here comes a fire truck, lights on, sirens blaring. The wife is hysterical. (She is still crying as she is telling the story, and I am sitting there trying to keep a straight face.) I guess a neighbor had called the fire department and reported a gas leak! Anyway, I asked her what she wanted me to do. First, she wanted me to do something about the smell in her house. I referred her to ServiceMaster. Second, she wanted me to remove the dead skunk. I got kind of a confused look on my face and asked, "You mean he killed it?" She said, "Yes, he was beating it and beating it and gagging and throwing up, it was horrible." I asked where it was and she pointed to the vacant lot across the street and said he had buried it there. I walked across the street. It was like the perfect murder, but he left one front hand of the skunk sticking out of the ground. The skunk had to have weighed fifteen pounds. It was by far the fattest, biggest skunk I had ever seen. I returned to my truck and she asked, "What can my husband do about the smell on himself?" My answer was (this is an old remedy- I had used it on my dogs and it worked), "Well ma'am, I am sure your husband is already humiliated enough, but he needs to fill up a bathtub with about four inches of water, get Massengil douche powder, put a large amount in the water, pour it over himself and not rinse it out." She replied, "Oh, I don't know if he'll do that." I asked where he was. She said he had gone to work, he was an executive at Humana. The contorted look on my face must have shocked her because she abruptly stopped crying and asked me what was wrong. I said, "No, he didn't really go to work, did he?" She said yes. With that, here comes a BMW screeching into the driveway. He got out of the car and marched into the house without saying a word. I knew what had happened. Yes folks, he had been sent home from work.

-Article by Margie Darling

## Those Darn Moles

Of all the animals we trap at Animal Ridders, moles get the least sympathy from homeowners because of the enormous damage they do to lawns. Some of the stories homeowners have told me about

their battles with these underground varmints are amusing to me, but the homeowners are quite frustrated. My all time favorite was when a customer called me from Prospect. She met me at her house. When I arrived, she informed me that it was either hire me or pay for her husband to see a psychiatrist over this mole, and I was cheaper. Then she went on to tell me the scenario of what was going on. The lawn was her husband's pride and joy. Then came the mole. He had tried to trap it, flood it with the hose, poison it, and gas it (he actually hooked a tube to the exhaust of his car and stuck it in the tunnel), but to no avail. His last resort was to take a shovel, and stand in the yard watching for it to move. He was totally obsessed. She said after an hour and a half, the ground moved, he stuck the shovel in, flipped up the earth, and no mole. With that, he let out a few colorful words, threw the shovel, hit the wife's new car, which dented and scraped it. (Oh boy, now the wife is mad.) He came in the house, face red, veins popping out of his neck, and got a beer out of the fridge. Then he went upstairs and locked himself in the bedroom for thirty minutes before he cooled off to go back out and inspect the damage to the car and apologize to the neighbor who happened to be out working in her yard at the time of his colorful outburst. Needless to say, during all of his efforts in the past two weeks to catch this mole, the mole had literally destroyed his entire front lawn. I set my traps, came back two days later, and got the mole that she said her husband wanted me to save for him so he could burn it at stake!

My second favorite is the day a lady called me asking, "Is killing a mole the only way to catch one?" I explained to her if you can catch them digging, you can dig them up and catch them live, but it takes a lot of time and patience. Since they are subterranean, the only traps designed are those designed to dispatch the animal. With that she informed me that she was a PETA member (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), but this mole had driven her over the edge. She asked me to go to her house and trap it and not tell ANYONE I had been there!

Moles are a member of the Talpidae family. The most common mole, which we deal with here in Kentucky, is the eastern mole. Moles are about the size of chipmunks and can weigh from three to six ounces. They are six to eight inches long. Moles have one litter a year. They generally breed in February and after a six week gestation period they produce litters of two to six moles. They are mammals and nurse from their mother. In April thru June, they disperse from their mother's tunnel system and this can last thru fall and early winter until they are on their own for good. They remain solitary until breeding season starts back up. They do not hibernate and are active year round. Because of specialized bone and muscle construction, a mole can exert a lateral digging force thirty two times its body weight. They can dig tunnels at a rate of 18 feet per hour and can do a hundred feet of tunneling a day. They also throw up "molehills" from their deeper tunnels; they excavate. Surface tunnels are for feeding and the deeper tunnels, 18 to 24 inches below the ground, lead to living chambers and connect their systems. Because mole tunneling is progressive and they continue to add onto tunnels year after year, the amount of lawn damage is not indicative to the amount of moles present. An average yard usually contains one to three moles per acre, unless there is a female with dispersing young.

Moles can be trapped year round unless the ground is frozen. Anytime of year is a good time to trap moles. Do not ignore your lawn in the winter because moles breed in February so if you trap in the winter you can avoid the springtime litters. Give us a call if you need help!

-Article written by Margie Darling

## Raccoon Rampage

Have you ever wondered if you should get your chimney capped? If you ever had a doubt, you won't after you read the follow-

ing stories. I have gotten birds, squirrels, screech owls, a barred owl, bats, chimney swifts, two very large beetles, and last but not least, countless numbers of raccoons and their young out of chimneys. With the exception of raccoons and chimney swifts, once an animal falls into your chimney, he can't get back out. A chimney swift can fly like a helicopter and can go in and out, building their small nests and gluing them to the side of the chimney, only a few feet from the bottom. Anyone who has heard their chanting knows how unnerving these birds are. However, the raccoon takes the cake for all time most bothersome chimney critter. Many people don't even know they are there until the family dog barks and growls at the fireplace or they don't own a pet at all and yet their house has become infested with fleas! The chimney is constructed with a clay liner. About every 18" there is a mortar joint. Raccoons climb in and out of chimneys using these mortar joints like steps on a ladder. Since their natural living quarters are hollow trees, not only is a chimney a perfect alternative, but it is dry and warm in those chimneys. Once inside the chimney, they nestle down at the bottom, on top of the flue and smoke chamber. They even live in furnace flues in the summer when your furnace is not running. I have removed a few adult raccoons and many baby raccoons that have gotten bored and wondered through the pipe that feeds from the furnace to the wall and slipped out of the furnace into the house. Never start a fire to try to run them out, or turn on the furnace. If they are young, they do not have the ability to climb out of the chimney until at least 12 weeks of age. Therefore, you may end up with dead, stinking animals to be removed. You got to love them. Here are some of our stories:

It was another day at the office. I got a call from a man in Plainview neighborhood. He had a raccoon in his basement. When I arrived, he went on to show me his daughters bedroom in the finished basement where at 1:00 a.m. a raccoon had fallen through the suspended dropped ceiling INTO BED with his daughter. In total hysterics, she ran upstairs to escape the horror she had just experienced. He had built the house and put a chimney flue to the basement that ended at the ceiling. He had not built the fireplace yet, but was going to add it in the future. The raccoon had come down the flue, got on the dropped ceiling and started wondering around. When it got over his daughter's bedroom, the ceiling could not hold its weight and the raccoon fell through the ceiling into bed with her. Hello!

I looked around and saw the raccoon hovering in the corner behind a chair. The chase was on. I had a noose but this guy wanted no part of it. The husband insisted on staying down there with me, his wife at the top of the stairs begging him to come up and let me handle it. After about five minutes, the raccoon runs around the corner and up the stairs. As I got to the bottom of the stairs, he was about five steps ahead of me. I looked up and saw the Mrs. at the top of the steps, still screaming for her husband to please come up. Her eyes got as big as saucers and I yelled, "Shut the door!" By that time the raccoon was hitting the top step and I was in hot pursuit about five steps behind him. The man of the house was on my heels. The raccoon hit the door right as she slammed it. With that, it turned around, saw us, took a flying leap, skimmed the top of both of our heads, landed and took off again. I started laughing so hard I had to take a break and catch my breath. I regained my composure and after a few more minutes I noosed him and threw him into the trap. I checked the fireplace upstairs to make sure there were no tenants in it. Thankfully, there were not. I capped both flues and was on my way. I have no doubt at all that he is telling this story 15 years later.

Before you decide to cap your chimney yourself, you may want to call us first to check it. Remember, raccoons are nocturnal. They sleep during the day, so if you cap your chimney during the day, and a raccoon is nice and cozy inside of it and sleeping, you will block him in. The only way out now is for him to lift the flue and come into the house in desperation for another escape route, as Mrs. Eckert found out the hard and costly way. Her story is as follows, written by Mrs. Eckert herself.

### Christmas Eve 2005-

*"Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." Or so we thought.*

The adventure begins on Christmas Eve 2005. As we awoke anticipating the arrival of Santa Claus with our children, we entered into the living room with anticipation of the gifts that were left behind. Ironically, the glass fireplace screen had been pushed over and left laying in pieces in front of the fireplace. Would Santa have left such a mess?

Unfortunately, knowing that we had eaten the cookies and drank the milk ourselves, we would never have created a mess of this magnitude to disguise the arrival of Santa through the chimney.

We quickly realized that we had received an unwanted house guest through the chimney, but where was he now? We searched the house and in the chimney but no evidence of the creature could be found anywhere. Was it an opossum? Was it a raccoon? What could have broken a 40 pound fireplace screen?

Without apprehension we decided to set a trap to catch the critter that had entered our home and left no visible marks other than the broken glass. Before we left for our extended vacation in Florida, we set the trap with instructions for our son to check the trap daily and keep us posted as to the intruder.

The following day we baited the trap and left the premise. The next day my son called to say the trap had been released but without capture. He proceeded to bait the trap once again, only to find that it had been released again without any capture. He decided it was time to get revenge, as no critter was going to outsmart a grown adult. He proceeded to place a dozen boxes of Decon throughout the house and a pan of anti-freeze near the chimney. After a weeks time ALL the Decon and anti-freeze was consumed by our little invader. Knowing that he had won the war, he periodically checked on the residence and found no evidence of any further invasions. He was certain that the invader had found a final resting place somewhere outside the home as there was no more damage and certainly no dead animal smell within the home.

Knowing that the animal was no longer making residence within the home, it was time to seal off the point of entry into the home by capping the chimney. Two days later upon returning to the residence it looked as though we had been burglarized. Unknowingly, the creature was now trapped within the home and it wanted out. It broke windows, opened cabinets, ate the window frames and destroyed the contents within the home.

It was time to call the professionals, Animal Ridders. Within two days the raccoon was captured and the repair process began. Our total loss exceeded \$9,000 in damages. I wish we would have called Animal Ridders sooner!!!!!!!!!!



**One of many windows damaged by the raccoon - the storm window made his attempt to escape a failure**



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## **Animal Rididers, Inc.**

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