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===== ***JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2025***



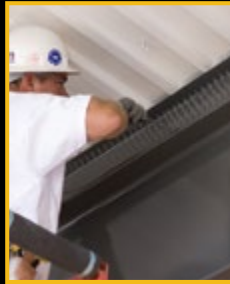
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**Wildlife Control Technology  
Magazine****On The Cover?**

An AI generated image of a raccoon sitting at a computer using AI Chat programs for social media and website blog posts.



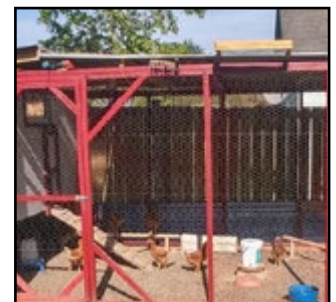
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COVER



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## Wildlife Control Technology

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**Wildlife Control Technology** (ISSN 1085-5394) is published bimonthly by WCT Group, Inc. Subscription rate is \$40.00 USD per year in the United States, \$70.00 USD per year in Canada. Single copy price is \$7.99

### Circulation inquires and information:

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Postmaster: Send address changes to:

**WCT Magazine**  
P.O. Box 357 ■ Sharon Center, OH 44274



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## FROM THE EDITOR

**ERIC ARNOLD, EDITOR**

**P.O. Box 357 ■ Sharon Center, OH 44272**



I want to start this editorial by addressing an email problem and discussing what to expect from the magazine in 2025.

The first item I want to address is the problem with my **editor@wctmagazine.com** email. To cut to the chase, that email had been down for an unknown time. I discovered the problem in mid-December and correcting it took over a week.

If anyone sent me an email and didn't hear back, please resend it so I can address it. While this specific problem was with my email, it was caused by the required security features being rolled out. Hence, I highly recommend that anyone with an email not from Google (e.g., Gmail) check to ensure it is sending and receiving emails properly.

Next, I want to talk about a new focus that will be appearing starting with this issue. This can be controversial for some, so I wanted to address it here.

Whether we like it or not, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being integrated into everything we do. As with most changes of this nature, there will be both benefits and disadvantages. Some of that is already happening, so I am implementing this new focus.

In short, I will print several articles produced by AI chat programs based on questions a potential client may ask. I aim to show operators how easily prospective jobs can be lost due to this technology and how they need to be prepared to confirm or reject the AI comments.

Now, before I start shouting

that the sky is falling, let's set the record straight: It isn't. What I see is a change to how wildlife control services are conducted and the education/experience level of those providing them.

Prospective clients have been searching the Internet for solutions to their wildlife problems for several decades now. Anyone who's been in business for any length of time has had customers tell them that they know what the problem is and how it needs to be fixed, thanks to their Google search. In my experience, they get it wrong most of the time. However, with AI chat programs, a lot of that goes away.

While AI chat programs make mistakes, most of their information is accurate and comes from qualified sources. Again, some caveats accompany this.

The first one is how good the AI program is. AI programs need to be "trained," and it costs a lot of money. Or at least, it used to. Today, most good AI programs seem to be owned and run by companies with huge pockets, such as Google, Microsoft, and IBM. Not only do they have the financial resources to dump into the development of these programs, but they also have the physical resources. This makes it almost impossible for any startup to make a better mouse-trap.

The second point that needs to be addressed concerns prompts (the interaction with the AI regarding questions asked or directions given). In the computer field, the programming saying is, "Garbage in equals garbage out." This is still

true today, but AI programs are helping to improve prompts by actively asking questions to clarify what data is being sought.

So, while you can get a result on the prompt, "What can cause noise from the attic," some AI programs will follow up their response by asking you to be more specific if you want additional information.

For example, you can start with the above prompt and then do another that says, "What noises do animals in an attic make?" This can then be followed up with, "I found an opening of this size that leads to the attic; what animals might be using it?" and ending with, "I have a raccoon in my attic; how do I remove it."

Some AI programs even allow you to tell them how many questions to ask and the general area for each question. This can be very helpful when writing blogs or social media posts (a subject that will be covered later).

For instance, you can do a prompt that says, "Write a 500-word blog post about raccoons in homes and ask me 5 questions about how to know if you have a problem, when they should contact a professional, what time of year these are most likely to happen, how necessary proper training is when dealing with a raccoon, and the best equipment to be used. The AI will generate those questions and after getting the answers, it will generate a blog post in seconds. Now, translate that over to a prospective client; hopefully, operators can see why this is a technology they should keep their eyes on. ■

# WCT RECAP: RELEASE FORMS

by Eric Arnold

*(Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the May/June 2015 issue of Wildlife Control Technology magazine.)*

**R**ecently, I've been noticing a lot of images and videos being posted on Facebook and YouTube showing individuals, objects, and property. While it's great that these images are being shared, most may not realize that when they take/record and post these images, they may be opening themselves up to litigation. As everyone should already be aware, I'm not an attorney, so none of what I discuss should be considered legal advice; however, I am a professional photographer with a good understanding of rights, releases, and licensing fees. For this article, "photographer" means anyone creating still images, video, or audio recordings, and "image" means any photograph, video, audio recording, editing, distortion, or modification of the original image.

## RELEASE FORMS

Cutting right to the chase, anyone using any image (or audio recording) in their business for purposes that can be construed as commercial (e.g., social media posts, website, flyers, etc.) should try to get a release or pay a licensing fee. With very few exceptions, anyone who uses material they do not have the right to use may be at financial risk. To understand this, let's start by understanding what a release is.

A release is a written document between an individual and/or the owner of property or their agent and the photographer creating the images. This document not only gives the photographer

the authority to create the images but also gives them the right to use those images in a specified manner later. The release protects the photographer against legal claims when using images covered by the release. These releases are generally broken into two categories: model releases and property releases. There are some distinct differences between the two releases, so it is important to understand when you need a model release, property release, or both.

Despite its name, a model release does not apply only to professional models. Rather, it is an agreement that states the signed individual has given consent to have their image or likeness or the image or likeness of a minor they are responsible for recorded and used in the agreed-upon manner.

A property release is an agreement between the photographer and the owner or owner's agent of a specific property (i.e., building, property, pet, work of art, etc.) granting permission to have images recorded of the property and used in the agreed upon manner. A property release may also be needed to record images on a specific property where the property is too large to identify specific items (such as a private park or farm). Although licensing agreements are technically different from property releases, I am lumping them together in this article for ease of understanding.

Suppose you are recording an image showing people in it (e.g., spouse, children under 18 other than your own, your children 18 and older, homeowner, technician, observers, etc.). In that case, you must have those individuals, their parents, or guardians sign a model

release BEFORE the image is recorded. When recording an image of another's property (i.e., home, boat, yard, vehicle, pet, etc.), a property release signed by the owner or owner's agent BEFORE the image is recorded is required. Sometimes, you must get a model release AND a property release BEFORE the image is recorded. In short, you need to think of what you will be recording and how it will be used first and then get the proper release signed BEFORE recording it.

What happens when you don't get the release signed BEFORE the image is recorded? Honestly, usually nothing. The problem is not so much with the recording but the image use. In most cases, you'll be fine if you can get a release for the material you recorded signed before you use it. However, if the individual refuses to sign the release or will only sign it after the release has been modified to suit their needs and you don't want to agree to their demands, you run the risk of being unable to use the image. I'll explain why later in the article, but I want to finish with the releases first.

Once you have the signed release, you still need to do some things. First, you will want to attach the images created with it. While this can take some time, it is about the only way you can legally protect yourself. If you don't want to take the time to do this, then there is really no reason to keep reading this or get the release in the first place. I wish you the best of luck.

One of the simplest ways to attach the release to the image is to add a unique "release" number

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**WCT RECAP:***Continued from page 4*

to the release and then store all of the images in a special folder on your computer with this number. An even better method is to add the release number to each image name whenever possible. When shooting a video, a good way to attach the release is to take a shot of the signed release at the beginning of the video and store the file, as previously described, in a unique folder on your computer.

Second, you'll want to keep the signed release form in a safe location, as you may have to produce the original later. If you get the release notarized for "run of the land," meaning you can record images including all visible features and structures for commercial use, it must be stored in a specific location, so it's also a good idea to make a digital copy of the release so that you have access to what the release says and who signed it if nothing else. Although I'm not sure how the courts would view a non-notarized digital copy of the release, I believe it is better than nothing, especially if there is a fire or water damage to where the actual releases are stored. By now, I'm sure some readers must wonder why I'm making such a big deal out of this. After all, you're doing nothing different from what everyone else is doing, right? Wrong! It's all about the right of privacy, right of publicity, property owner's rights, defamation, and commercial usage.

**RIGHT OF PRIVACY**

Although all 50 states have different laws, they all recognize that individuals have the right to be left alone and that harm from embarrassment, loss of status, or scorn can occur when that right is violated. This is known as the right of privacy.

Now comes the confusing part:

the right of privacy is not absolute. Courts have long held that when an image of an individual is more valuable to society than that individual's right to privacy, the image is protected under the First Amendment and does not necessarily have to have a signed release for it to be used. However, if the image is used in such a manner that its use can be viewed more as making money (commercial usage) than for public commentary, the image now falls back under the right of privacy and would require a release for its use. In other words, the privacy issue is not so much with the image itself but rather how it is used.

**RIGHT OF PUBLICITY**

Simply put, this is the right an individual has to control how their image is used for commercial purposes. While this is more prone to be encountered with a famous person, in today's world of reality stars and instant millionaires, a person can literally go from an unknown to celebrity status overnight, which is why I'm mentioning it. Additionally, some of us do work for professional athletes, well-known CEOs, and former Presidents. While some will have celebrity status, others' status can change daily, so care should be taken. While it's great that you got the picture of a minor league baseball player beside you while holding the raccoon that tore apart his attic, posting it on your webpage can cause issues without a signed release when they are called to the majors.

**PROPERTY OWNER'S RIGHTS**

Objects don't have legal rights and thus cannot be subject to privacy or defamation issues. While the objects don't have rights, the same is not true for the people or businesses that own them. This is where property rights come into play. This can be very confusing as there isn't a lot of legal precedence to go by. Without a doubt, taking

images of someone's house and then posting them on YouTube to try and recruit business will require a property release, but filming work performed on the house to prove you did the work stated in the contract is a different issue. Again, we get into the issue of how the image will be used and not so much if you can make the image in the first place. The best thing to do if you think the images of the property may be used for anything in the future is to try and get a release.

**DEFAMATION**

This is likely a problem an operator will never encounter, but I wanted to cover it in case it should occur. The term "defamation" includes slander, which is spoken, and libel, which is published in a tangible medium. A defamation lawsuit would be one where the individual feels they have been portrayed in such a manner as to damage their reputation. This could have been done on purpose through editing and posting images in such a manner to depict a negative scene or strictly by accident by having an image showing the individual where it looks like they are supporting an activity they do not support. Again, this is most likely something no one in the industry will encounter. Still, now you know not to use an image on Facebook of a recognizable vegetarian at a pig roast where you supplied the feral pig without getting their release first.

**EDITORIAL USE OR COMMERCIAL USE**

When I talk about how an image will be used, I'm referring to whether the image will be used for editorial or commercial content.

When an image is said to be in editorial use, it is viewed as newsworthy. Newsworthy is not limited to current events printed in newspapers or magazines; it includes factual, educational, and historical

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**WCT RECAP:**

*Continued from page 6*

ical data and entertainment and amusement concerning certain human activity. The First Amendment protects editorial use as freedom of the press.

Commercial use of an image is said to occur when the image is used for advertising, endorsements, or other commercial purposes. So, an image printed in an article in *Wildlife Control Technology Magazine* on moles that shows a mole in a trap would be considered editorial. In contrast, that image used in a printed advertisement in *Wildlife Control Technology Magazine* to help sell the mole trap would be regarded as commercial. Although it is the same image, one time it is being used for education while the other time it is being used to generate sales, so you have two different use classifications.

For most people, the test between editorial and commercial will be whether the image can be construed as soliciting business or educating viewers. A very simple way to think about this is that if you plan on listing your business name and/or any contact information with the image, it will most likely be viewed as commercial and require a release. Otherwise, it will most likely be viewed as editorial and can be used without the release.

**COPYRIGHT / MARKS / SENSITIVE USES**

Remember when I said I'd explain why you must have a signed release before using an image? Well, here is where we discuss that issue. First, it is important to understand the difference between copyright and a release. When a human creates an image, it usually is viewed as the property of the individual who created it. This individual owns the image and has control over how that image may be used or modified. In oth-

er words, they own the copyright to the image. Everyone needs to understand that just because you have the copyright to an image, it does not mean you have the right to use it. This brings us back to the right of privacy and the right of publicity. Furthermore, depending on what the image contains, there may be another issue with the image regarding "marks."

A mark is a shorthand term referring to a trademark or a service mark. Mark's started as a form of consumer protection to keep the public from being misled or confused as to the source of a service or product. Generally, a trademark is applied to goods, while a service mark is linked with service delivery. It is important to understand here that while you may not be restricted in recording an image of a trademarked product, you are limited in using that image so that it does not cause confusion with the product. For instance, you should not take an image of a Coke bottle in front of a raccoon in a cage trap and post it. This can lead viewers to believe that not only was a bottle of Coke an important component in catching the raccoon but also that the Coca-Cola Company supports its use in this manner, which would most likely violate their trademark rights and cause some unpleasant issues for you.

As a quick example of what can happen with trademarks, Alan Huet, past owner of WCS, told me several times of the letter he received from Nestle demanding that he change the name of his squirrel paste bait from Nutter Butter to something else as they claimed it was an infringement on their cookie's trademark even though the two products weren't close to being the same and could not be confused. This shows that companies with deep enough pockets actively search for conflicts and have no problem causing problems for others to get their way.

Lastly, we have the issue of sensitive use. Usually, sensitive use issues are related to the subjects of sex, religion, politics, and health, although there are other areas of concern as well. These issues occur when you have a release for the image, but how it is used may cause an issue with the individual or property it contains. For this reason, modifying the release is sometimes a good idea. This would authorize you to use the image in a manner others may find discomforting, offensive, or distasteful. Remember that you can modify a release, but if you can't get it signed, it doesn't matter. A good example of this would be an image of a well-known celebrity that is then used to support an activity they do not support, like hunting or trapping. Although you received a signed model release from them, if you did not expressly state that the image could be used to promote hunting or trapping, you may be in for a world of hurt.

**LEGAL THEORIES**

As we've already discussed, you need to have a model release when using a person's image or likeness for commercial purposes. Although I've discussed getting a property release signed, I haven't explained why you should go to all that trouble. I'm not qualified to answer this complicated legal question, but I'll give you my understanding of it. The real reason for getting a property release is based on two legal theories.

The first theory is known as association. Association is when an individual's or business's identity may be connected to a property. Images of your company shooting pigeons at a food processing facility could cause the owners to interpret the images as an attack on the cleanliness of their business and file a defamation of character

*Continued on page 10*

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I agree that this release shall be binding on me, my legal representatives, heirs, assigns. I have read the above authorization and release prior to its execution and I am fully cognizant of its contents.

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, a Notary Public, do hereby certify that on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, the signed officer personally appeared \_\_\_\_\_, known or satisfactorily proven to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument, and swore and acknowledged to me that he executed the same for the purpose and in the capacity therein expressed, and that the statements contained therein are true and correct. In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and notarial seal.

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**WCT RECAP:***Continued from page 8*

lawsuit.

The second theory is known as conversion. This one is easier to understand as it means you have used the property of another for personal gain without the owner's consent. If I record an image of your house and then use it on social media to sell bat jobs without your permission, I have converted your house into personal gain and thus committed conversion.

However, by having a signed property release, you have gained a measure of protection against both association and conversion.

**CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP**

Now that you've gone through all the work of getting a property release signed and recorded some images, what happens to those images when the property is sold?

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Are you still allowed to keep using those images, or do you need to get another release signed by the new owners? Usually, the answer will be you're okay since the original property owner signed the release, but that doesn't mean the new owner may not try to stop you from using them. However, what if you're dealing with a high-profile property? Something like the home of a celebrity or well-known politician? To protect yourself and save as much as possible on legal fees, you have to do whatever the state law in which the property is located requires to have "run with the land" with the release.

While each state will be different, this generally means three specific actions must be accounted for.

1. In the release language, state that the release binds the rights of the owner and their heirs, successors, and assigns.

2. Have the release signed in front of a notary public (this will require some special language to be written on the release).

3. Record the release in the same place where the deed to that property is recorded.

**HINTS & TIPS**

I've included a sample property release for everyone's review. By no means does this mean you should start using this release, as everyone will have different laws; however, it is something that you can have an attorney review and modify as necessary.

When offering any release, pay a small amount (\$5, \$10, \$50) and, if necessary, include any additional discount you give them (25% off, etc.). If you only list the discounted rate and the release is challenged, it is harder to prove that you provided valuable consideration when numbers are moved around versus showing a cashed check. (If you want to pay cash, immediately give a copy of the release to the model

or owner and write CASH next to the dollar amount.)

Make sure that the release language gives you and your heirs all rights to the images, allows for modification of all images, and waives the models' or owners' right to review any images before they can be used.

Binding legal contracts can only be entered by someone of the age of majority (18 and older), so ask for ID if you're not sure to verify that the person signing the release will be legally bound. Also, if you need a release for a minor, make sure that their parent or guardian signs it, not a grandparent, friend, friend's parent, or sibling who happens to be 18 or older. Additionally, when working with property releases, ensure the individual has the legal authority to sign the release, and they aren't a tenant, employee, or manager. For instance, you cannot sign a property release for property owned by your parents even if you are of legal age and live in/on the property. You cannot legally sign the release even if they say you can without a Power of Attorney granting authority.

When possible, have the release signed by a witness and record their printed name, signature, and date on the release. The provided sample does not have this on it for space reasons; instead, it shows an area for a notary public, who would be the witness if the release were to be notarized.

Images and recordings are excellent marketing tools for wildlife control operators. By understanding when a release is required and having the appropriate individual sign and date the release, you protect yourself and your business whenever an image is used. A release can also increase a business's value, as, provided you have all the necessary paperwork, you can end up with thousands of sellable images. ■



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## LIQUID GRUBS

Anyone who has been involved in this industry for any length of time knows how frustrating it is to try and capture a skunk while they are destroying a clients yard looking for grubs. I believe this product will drastically change your success ratio when trapping both grubbing and roaming skunks. This lure is not to be trailed into the trap. Place about a tablespoon at the back of the trap forcing the skunk to cross the pan to reach the lure. Give it a try, you will be more than satisfied!

1oz.....\$3.00..4oz.....\$10.00..16oz.....\$22.00..6oz jar.....\$5.50

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If you intend to be or have been in this business for any length of time, there will be a time when, in the spring of the year, you encounter a female raccoon that has had young in your client's attic. You have caught the female and located the young, but they are in a spot in the house that will require you to rent a bulldozer to tear down the house to retrieve those young! This is not a feasible option! In these cases the only option is to release the female and try to harass her to move the young, either to a more accessible location that you can retrieve them or out of the dwelling completely. Don't waste your time on radio's and moth balls. About one ounce of this product will make the female remove her family from the dwelling in no more than 48 hours. It almost always works on the first night but has not taken over two days yet. You must enter the attic to apply this liquid. Place the liquid on a tennis ball, then screw the ball to a large nylon piece of rope. Toss the ball in those hard to reach places near the den and retrieve. Do this in every spot of the attic except near the exit hole. In two days mark the hole to make sure there is no activity. Then seal up the hole. I hate to leave a job without the animal, but there are some situations you just can't control.

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Big Time (raccoon)	Bacon (raccoon, skunk, opossum)
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## ***SPECIES PROFILE - BIG BROWN BAT***

**T**he Big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) is one of North America's most widespread and adaptable bat species. It is found from southern Canada to northern South America. This medium-sized bat is known for its hardiness, ability to thrive in urban areas, and essential role in controlling insect populations.

### **Physical Description**

Big brown bats are aptly named for their size and coloration. They measure 3.5–5 inches in body length, with a wingspan of 12–16 inches, and weigh 0.5–1.2 ounces. Their fur is glossy and ranges from light to dark brown, with a paler underside. Their broad wings and robust build allow for steady, maneuverable flight. Unlike some other species, big brown bats have relatively short, rounded ears and a distinctive fleshy nose.

### **Habitat and Distribution**

Big brown bats are incredibly versatile, inhabiting diverse environments such as forests, grasslands, deserts, and urban areas. They roost in trees, caves, and rock crevices, but they have also adapted well to human structures, frequently using barns, attics, and bridges as roosting sites. This adaptability allows them to thrive even in heavily urbanized regions, making them one of the most commonly encountered bats by humans.

### **Diet and Foraging Behavior**

Big brown bats are insectivores that prefer hard-bodied prey such as beetles, moths, wasps, and flies. They play a vital role in agricultural pest control, targeting insects that damage crops. They are considered aerial hawkers, meaning they typically catch prey while



**Hibernating Big brown bat.** Notice the direction of the bricks compared to the direction of the bat. Despite popular thought, bats do not always hang with their heads facing down especially when hibernating.

flying. Using echolocation, they detect prey mid-flight and consume it quickly, often eating their meals while flying.

A single big brown bat can consume its body weight in insects nightly, making them invaluable for maintaining ecological balance. Their feeding activity typically peaks shortly after sunset and continues in bursts throughout the night.

### **Roosting and Behavior**

Big brown bats use different roost types depending on the time of year and their life stage. Summer roosts, often in buildings or hollow trees, are used for day rest and rearing young. Winter hibernation roosts, typically caves or abandoned mines, are chosen for their stable temperatures and protection from predators.

These bats are highly social, forming colonies that vary in size from a few individuals to several hundred. During colder months, they enter hibernation to conserve energy, lowering their metabolic

rate and body temperature to survive periods of food scarcity.

### **Reproduction**

Breeding occurs in the fall, but big brown bats exhibit delayed fertilization like many bat species. Females store sperm through the winter, and ovulation occurs in spring when food is more abundant. After a gestation period of 60–70 days, females give birth to one or two pups, typically in late spring or early summer.

Pups are born blind and furless but develop rapidly. By three weeks of age, they begin to fly and learn to hunt insects. Mothers are highly attentive, nursing their young until they are fully weaned at around six weeks. Big brown bats reach sexual maturity at one year.

### **Seasonal Movements and Hibernation**

Big brown bats are relatively sedentary compared to other bat species, often remaining within a few dozen miles of their roosts year-round. However, in colder re-





Enlarged image of a Big brown bat showing the long silky fur on its back.

gions, they migrate short distances to hibernation sites. During hibernation, they rely on fat reserves built up during the active months to survive.

### Predators and Lifespan

Big brown bats face threats from predators such as owls, hawks, raccoons, snakes, and domestic cats. Despite these challenges, they are long-lived for their size, with individuals often surviving 10 years or more in the wild. Their resilience is partly due to their adaptability and ability to evade predators using their sharp senses and swift flight.

### Human Interactions and Conservation

Big brown bats are among the bat species most often encountered by humans due to their frequent use of buildings as roosting sites. While they are generally harmless, their presence can

sometimes cause concern due to the accumulation of guano or fear of disease. Wildlife professionals often use exclusion techniques to manage bats humanely, sealing entry points to prevent re-entry into structures.

This species is considered stable and is not currently threatened. However, big brown bats face ongoing challenges from habitat loss, pesticide use, and white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease that has devastated many bat populations.

The big brown bat is a resilient and adaptable species, playing a crucial role in ecosystems as a natural pest controller. Their ability to thrive in a wide range of environments makes them an important species for maintaining ecological balance. Protecting their habitats and addressing threats like white-nose syndrome are essential for ensuring the continued success of this remarkable bat species. ■

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## FROM THE TOOLBOX

**JACK AMMERMAN**

5104 Woodstock Drive ■ Swartz Creek, MI 48473

### She Told Me That I Smell

**M**y wife hugged me this evening and said, “You smell like paste bait.” I found this a bit disconcerting, as I haven’t touched any paste bait for well over a week. It was even more unsettling when I realized that she hadn’t found a single paste bait that smelled good. I asked her which paste bait she smelled.

“Does it smell like Big Time? Does it smell like Tutti-Fruity? Does it smell like Squirrel paste? What about Chuckster? Do I smell like groundhog bait?”

She replied that they all smelled alike to her and then pointed out that it was only on my right side. Surprisingly, she had given me a second hug, and her olfactory senses had rather approved of my left side. Now I’m wondering what exactly I smell like and why it’s only on my right side. There is a chance, albeit very slight, that she is chuckling all the way into the bedroom, and she is just messing with my mind. I would be proud of her for thinking this caper up, but at the same time, I’d be ticked off that she was playing mind games with me. She knows I am severely ill-equipped for that kind of mental combat.

Speaking of mysterious smells, I remember the first time I came home reeking of skunk. I had captured one in a cage, and just as I put the last part of the blanket over the trap, the skunk showed its disapproval. It wasn’t a powerful, full blast of rage. It was enough to re-



mind me that I was dealing with a skunk. The skunk didn’t realize I knew exactly what I was dealing with. Its display of dominance was just not necessary. The trap blanket stunk, the back of my truck stunk, and when I turned on the air conditioner in my truck cab, it stunk, too. Somewhere in there, I guess I had also picked up the odor. Within minutes of walking in the door, oblivious to the fact that I was bringing in a foul odor, my wife showed me the way back outside. After a quick change of clothes, with all the world able to watch, I was warily welcomed back inside. At that point in my wildlife control

career, I didn’t know about the skunk spray remedy. My clothes stayed outside for a week.

Despite that early misadventure, when someone asks me what my favorite animal to trap is, I always reply, “A Skunk!” Skunks, to me, aren’t felons like raccoons. They normally don’t do much damage to a house. They may try to cozy up under a deck or in a garage. They’re easy to catch and easy to release, and they are attracted to almost any bait that you place in a cage trap. But they’ve gotten a bad rap because of their peculiar way of defending themselves.



I reached the point in my trapping life where I could read a skunk's mannerisms and know how much wiggle room I have before it sends me a double stream. I pride myself in picking up a skunk in a cage trap and slowly walking it back to my truck, with no blanket or cover between me and the skunk. If the skunk turns its tail toward me, I slowly rotate the trap so that it is now pointing away. Inevitably, the skunk will rotate in the trap to correct this aiming error, but I am already rotating the trap to counter its move.

The last skunk that I did this to was at an apartment complex. The maintenance man had caught the skunk in their cage trap. My job was to transfer it into my cage and take it away. I went to look at the situation and decided to carry their trap to my truck. My truck was about a city block away because the apartment complex was very large. The skunk turned circles, and I rotated the trap in kind. We made it to my truck, and I did the transfer. It was a successful job, but they don't always go that way.

A very loyal client of mine had a skunk that forgot to read the rulebook. It sprayed the second I gently lifted the trap. I got both barrels. There was no use in covering anything now, so I hefted it up and headed toward my truck. There was one more spraying incident on the way, but my trap rotation avoided a direct hit. Instead, I walked right into the mist. I knew

### Skunk Spray Remedy

#### Ingredients:

1 quart (4 cups) of 3% hydrogen peroxide  
¼ cup of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate)  
1–2 teaspoons of liquid dish soap (like Dawn)

#### Instructions:

Mix the ingredients in an open container (do not store in a closed container, as the mixture releases gas and could explode if contained).

Apply the mixture immediately to the affected area. Let the solution sit for 5–10 minutes, then rinse thoroughly with water.

Repeat if necessary, and then wash with shampoo or mild soap.

I was bad off. I called my wife to make sure we had the proper ingredients for me to de-skunk myself. She checked, and we were out of hydrogen peroxide. Luckily, there was a drugstore on the route home.

My body reminds me every day that I'm getting older, but my mind is still stuck in adolescence much of the time. I parked my truck in the drug store parking lot and headed in. I knew that the hydrogen peroxide was in aisle seven. As I headed that way, I passed the chip aisle (aisle number four.) Someone was halfway down, bent at the waist, examining the ingredients of a package of chips. I couldn't resist. Just then, I, too, craved some potato chips! I walked down, got within a few feet of the other shopper, and bent to the bottom shelf to get a bag of chips. That person

stood up as fast as a lightning bolt and scurried away. I couldn't laugh out loud, but I was shaking from holding it in. My wife disapproved of my story and found little humor in it, but I laugh about it today. I bought the peroxide (a double dose) and went home for the deck-side strip-down and the skunk remedy sponge bath. All turned out well. I wish I could hear that shopper's side of the story!

I rarely euthanize a skunk. I enjoy interacting with them. I have property that gives me the benefit of releasing them without the fear that the neighbors will complain. Some walk away, some run, and some seem to want to stay in the cage and interact a bit more. Interestingly, I never have skunk problems, but they probably recognize a stand-up guy when they see one, and so they leave me alone.

I'll wrap this up now and head toward the shower to try and clear up the mysterious paste bait odor. With skunk season approaching, I hope your phone rings off the hook. I thoroughly enjoy trapping skunks. They're great sources of revenue, and the jobs are usually sold before I even answer the phone. Just remember, if you happen to get sprayed, that's why you charge the sums that you do. Don't panic. Don't get mad. And most importantly, don't take it out on the skunk. It's just defending himself, and we'd all rather be sprayed by a skunk than bitten by a raccoon. ■

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## ***TRAP CHECK FROM HOME***

**A**t the time of this writing, I have just gotten out of the field after some much-needed time off from my regular day-to-day work, trapping coyotes for about three weeks, like I do every year in November. I had planned to stay out for about 30 days, but a very abrupt change in the weather with ground-freezing conditions made me pull everything. I keep my wax dirt on hand for coyote management jobs and don't want to use it in the field when I'm just practicing and helping the farmers in November. Usually, here in the Midwest, on the eastern border of Iowa, freezing conditions don't start until mid or late December.

If you want to be good at something, you have to do it a lot! As I've said in other articles, I've officially trained with three different people: Mike McMurray on sheep ranches in 1995, Mark Zaggar of Coyote U in New York, and the Great Craig O'Gorman in Montana four times. These gentlemen have played important roles in my success over the years, and I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to spend time with them.

Anybody who knows me knows I'm obsessive about trapping coyotes, so I spend as much time as possible in the field. You can read all the books you want and train with the best, but none of it will do

you any good if you don't put it into practice. November is my practice month, giving me some time away from the daily grind. It also allows me to try new things. For example, this year, I put cameras in all my locations. Although I've used cameras for years, I've only used them on specific locations, usually the ones that were the farthest out, and of course, on all of my coyote management projects, but never all of my locations when I was practicing in November. I still get a kick out of pulling up to an area and seeing a coyote jump up; what a rush!

In a previous article, I discussed the pros and cons of the Tactacam Reveal X Gen 2.0 and the Spartans I've used for years. I'm not going to go into the pros and cons again, but I will tell you that I now have more Tactacam cameras than Spartan cameras. I prefer the Tactacam's more. It has a very simple and straightforward setup and use and great pictures, but the on-demand feature of telling the camera to take a photo whenever you want is just fantastic! Specific Spartan cameras will do the same thing as well.

Many of you know that I sold my business in 2013 to Orkin and now focus on rodent and wildlife proofing of structures and my specialty of coyote mitigation. If I were still in business doing regular daily general wildlife management,



I wouldn't do it without cameras on every job! The savings on fuel and time alone would have been immense! I won't even practice in the field without cameras at each location.

I have a few things to share that may be helpful to any of you using them for your coyote work or for overseeing a location for the canines.

1. Although I love my Spartan tree or post mounts, the best ones I have ever used for that application because of their small size and quick camera setup, there's not always a tree or a post around when you're trapping coyotes out in the middle of farm fields. I have found the HME camera stands to be very simple and versatile. These stands can literally be stepped into the ground anywhere, keeping my camera stable and adjustable in height and position. It is very lightweight but durable. I've used sev-

eral other types, but I like these the best.

2. When using cameras to check locations for captured coyotes, I have found that approximately 20 yards away from the set location has worked best for me. Although I have pictures from cameras that were 50 yards away, 20 yards seems to be the sweet spot: not too close to possibly spook them away from a trap set location where I'm trying to catch them, but not so far away that I can't tell if a coyote is captured.

3. The coyote is not always standing up when you tell the camera to take a picture. The on-demand feature is great for telling the camera to take additional pictures a minute or two or five later, as he may blend in while sleeping in the grass! It's amazing how well they blend in! In taller grass or brush, it's better to have the camera set up higher so you can look down on top of the location.

4. Assuming you'll be checking locations in the morning, always ensure that your camera is set up with the morning sun to the camera back. Otherwise, you may not be able to see anything.

5. If setting up locations for canines in the winter, with snow on the ground or snow coming, set up your camera to watch the location



**HME Trail Camera Holder with 360-degree Rotational Camera Head**

with the predominant wind for that area blowing into the back of the camera, not the front. Otherwise, your camera will be packed with snow, giving you no picture.

6. I found the best pictures are taken right at daybreak! These pictures are blacker and whiter and easily highlight an animal captured or a big black circle in the middle of a grassy or brushy area. Because these animals can blend in so well, sometimes full color is not your friend.

In my experience using these cameras in conjunction with trap set locations for coyotes, I haven't found any problems regarding a canine working a set as long as the camera wasn't too close. Again, I



**Spartan Camera Mini Stealth Mount**

never have my cameras set to take photos or videos based on movement close to a set location, as this could very easily diminish capture success. If I want to monitor activity, I set an additional camera a little farther away, angled away from the set location where I believe the coyotes are traveling to and from the set area.

I still visit each location daily following the law, even if I know no canine has been captured. This helps me ensure there aren't any problems or issues at a set that can't be seen from the photo. The cameras are just tools to let me know what's captured and where giving me versatility in where I go first and last.

These cameras are another fantastic tool for doing my job better, faster, and more strategically!

■



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## ***AROUND THE CAGE TRAPS***

**PAUL WINKELMANN**

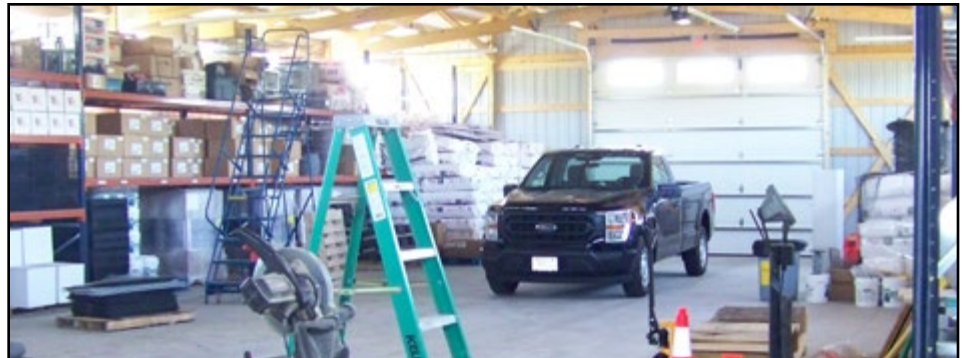
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### ***THINGS THAT HAVE WORKED FOR US***

**N**ext year will mark 70 years of catching animals for me. Half those years were spent fur trapping, and the other half was mainly cage trapping. We weren't in the animal damage business very long when we realized that most of our business was southeast of us. So, a few years later, we sold our home and moved into a brand new one we had built. This move saved us time and money and was a very smart move on our part.

Any family member interested in the business was immediately accepted. Working for and with family members is different from working for a stranger. You tend to make helpful suggestions and do things that encourage more business when you know you may own part of that business someday. Working for yourself is pretty unbelievable. Working a couple of hours daily is not how I pictured retirement, but it is better than I could have imagined!

I have mentioned before that we were fortunate to locate an office building when we got too big to keep operating out of our residence. That building is now worth at least twice what we paid for it. But even more intelligent was building a large drive-thru pole barn next to the office. Now our employees can see all the cages, rodent boxes, insulation, etc. If they spot something they need, all they have to do is get out of their vehicle and load it up. I am impressed with the number of different cages we have



stored in that barn; many of them were given to us by customers.

We have decent advertising to do as well as we have been doing. Besides the Internet, newsprint, and other readable ads, we do plenty of face-to-face work when the opportunity presents itself. We are fortunate to have people who are easy to talk to and able to answer questions. Local business fairs, home shows, and other business get-togethers are regularly attended. You can tell what a great job your employees are doing when you see that a large percentage of your customers have been recommended to you by other customers.

One of the local automotive repair shops could see that our future would be bright. They wanted our business from the start. They offered good service at reasonable prices and always tried to get our vehicles done quickly. I understand that they have done some repairs on our personal vehicles for practically nothing. That's an intelligent way of doing business. When you have at least two dozen vehicles on the road during the busy season, keeping them all running smoothly

is important.

One thing I wish I had done from the start of our animal removal business is keeping track of all the interesting wildlife we caught and all the great people we met. As you get older, your mind doesn't keep track of all the neat things you do. I kept a diary of my Alaskan hunt way back in 1966. It is amazing to read some of the stuff that I've forgotten. For example, after my hunt was over, I got hired to do sales for the largest taxidermy company in probably the world. This led me to meet most of the best Alaskan guides in the country. I should have learned my lesson and kept better track of our ADC work, but it isn't easy to do when you're busy.

I may have mentioned this before, but it bears repeating. When I switched from fur trapping to mainly cage trapping, I was concerned about how much I would enjoy it. Well, I shouldn't have worried; I enjoy caging animals more than I ever enjoyed catching them in foot-holds. Yes, I do get a bit more, but at my age, they're the ones who are probably going to get sick, not me. ■





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# RETIREMENT

by Gordon Betts

**W**hen do you know it's time to retire? That's a question I ask myself whenever I get into a tough job. I think that the honest answer is different for each individual.

I retired from my real job, as we called it, after 38 years. I started as a seasonal employee and became an upper Manager in charge of five facilities. At 62, the job was no longer fun.

For me, the actual job wasn't hard. There was usually something different going on every day. The hours were tolerable, and the benefits were very good. At my peak, the 125 employees under me were great for the most part, especially the 15 permanents who did the day-to-day supervision. My immediate bosses were good people who had come up through the ranks like I had. We were all a lot like an extended family. However, stress over being responsible for the safety and welfare of a hundred thousand people annually and the State mandates just got to be too much. The number of those thinking they are entitled grew, replacing the ones who just wanted to have a good time. The paperwork, justification for what should have been obvious expenditures, and other ridiculousness from the state in the form of mandates just added to killing the job for me. So I got out. I retired.

That would be my long-winded introduction to the number one reason people retire from any job: they are tired of doing it or burned out, as they say.

Having been a NWCO part-time for years and needing something to do, the obvious outcome was that I would start my own NWC business. I was lucky that the area

we retired to had an open niche for a NWC business. The area was wide open, and with no professional NWCO in sight, it was a good six years. However, 2021 had been a bit different. An increase of NWCOs in the area and a couple of new cross-overs had cut into my business considerably. As I have written before, the client base isn't large enough to support a large number of NWCOs, especially the number of whom are trying to make a living. Those new NWCOs were/are beating the bushes for jobs, and if I hadn't had a couple of contracts signed and sealed, it would have been a disastrous year for us.

Thus, we face the second reason to retire or get out. The business is no longer profitable or making enough to make a living.

From a profit standpoint, the two contracts that saved the business also cut the overhead considerably. So much so that 2021 was the best year ever from a profit/loss point of view. Why would I want to retire then? Other factors can affect a decision to retire.

Wanting to spend more time with family is a good one. Having worked odd hours and been on call 24-7 most of our lives, the question is, how much family time has been lost? I don't know exactly, but I know it is a lot! Now could be the time to spend more time with family and/or friends before it's too late.

Health is another top reason to retire. While we all hope to retire in good enough health to enjoy our retirement, some people can't. They work until their health is so bad that they are done as soon as they retire, never being able to enjoy what they worked all of their lives for.

Speaking for myself, since I

turned 65 a few years back, my mind has said you can do what you did when you were thirty-five. Then my body says if you do, you will pay for it. I've paid for it a few times. On top of that, my physician recently told me to slow down and smell the roses. Slugging a 30-foot ladder by myself isn't happening anymore. For that matter, climbing a 30-footer isn't happening anymore, either. Both issues limit the jobs I am now doing to mostly ground jobs and single story jobs.

Now, let's look at reasons not to retire other than being too young.

A big reason, maybe the biggest, is a lack of financial planning. An epidemic is coming in about 20 years when people in their 40s reach retirement age. Many have no retirement. This financial pandemic will only worsen as the younger generations reach retirement age without any retirement plan or savings. People complained about the cost of retirement for the baby boomers. That cost is nothing like paying for the later generations with no retirement savings or plan. Many plans for individuals and small businesses will give a person at least some financial security upon retirement. Talk to your accountant or banker about them. Don't count on selling your business for enough to retire on. You may, or more likely, may not get it.

For example, with my small business, I would sell off all of the associated equipment and lures that go into the business. I would keep the truck and remove the advertising. I'd keep many of the hand tools that I also use around the house. Trying to sell the business name and client list isn't feasible. All told, I may get a couple thousand dollars if I'm lucky. I haven't

taken an inventory lately, so it might be a bit more or less. Certainly not enough to retire on. Luckily, I don't have to depend upon it. My mentor had a much larger business that he sold off as a working business. He still didn't get enough to be financially secure for more than a year or so, if that even. Luckily, he had planned ahead.

Another reason for staying is the opposite of my number one reason for leaving: the job is still enjoyable. To loosely quote an old saying, choose a job you like, and you will never work a day in your life. If everything is going well and it is still enjoyable, why leave, especially if nothing else occupies your time?

A third reason is much like not planning financially for retirement. It's carrying too much overhead. It's hard to retire when you have payroll to meet or are still paying

on a fleet of trucks and equipment. It should be a different ball game when employees depend on you for their livelihoods. Owing money can be worked around with the sale of a company, but it will take away from the final profit. Also, a large debt could deter the sale of the company even if it shows a good profit margin.

As you can see, there are pros and cons to retirement. Money is the biggest thing to be concerned about. Social Security and Medicare don't cut it. That \$1,000 in the bank every month doesn't go far. Medicare only pays about 80% of medical bills. I recently saw a bill for one procedure costing \$16,000 for just one test. That would leave a remaining bill of \$3,200, or over three months' worth of SS payments. The "golden years" can be fools' gold.

Thinking about retirement can

be scary. Be sure of your facts, and have a realistic plan or two ready for implementation. Have an idea of what you want to do after retirement. Keeping busy is an important part of retiring. That "to-do list" doesn't last long when it is being worked on. I started an NWC business, write for *WCT Magazine*, and freelanced occasionally. If you are already in an NWC business, you can write for WCT, or you will need to find something else to do. My dad was a journeyman machinist. When he retired, he and my mom traveled; when not traveling, he advocated for outdoor sports at both the state and federal levels. He used to say, "I'm busier now than when I was working."

Trust me when I say that retirement is great once you get used to it. When properly planned, it is, or can be, the next best thing to being young again. Why not enjoy it? ■



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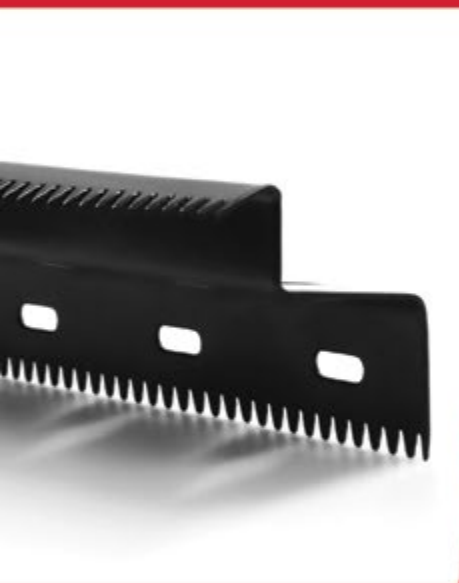


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# The Usual Suspects: Chicken Predators

by John R. Consolini

There are two reasons to have chickens. One is for their eggs, and the second is for the meat. There are three general categories: egg-laying, meat-producing, and dual-purpose breeds. There are several different breeds of birds and several colored eggs, too. Some birds lay white eggs, whereas others lay brown and some even green eggs.

Most birds are temperamental, with some becoming very petty. That is what I call the ones that like to be around people and even picked up and held. The list of chicken species is almost endless: Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red, Leghorn, Wyandotte,



The author's chicken coop with enclosed yard.

and Araucana for medium-to-large birds, and then there are the small Bantam and Silkie breeds. As for egg-laying birds, some breeds start laying at seven to eight weeks old, whereas other breeds start laying at seven to eight months old.

I have a dozen Novogen Chickens. This breed was developed in France and derived from a cross between Rhode Island Red and Leghorn. They are not dual-purpose birds. They are egg-laying birds, and that's it. Each bird lays nine eggs in a ten-day time frame, or roughly 300 eggs per year; the eggs are large to jumbo brown eggs. Most birds live up to 6-7 years in a backyard and will produce eggs for

3-4 years. The level of egg production, egg size, and shell quality decrease yearly; like commercial layers, I will keep my birds for 2-1/2 years and start a new flock in the third year.

Valuable birds like these, or any poultry, need to be protected from aerial and ground predators. Still, as we know, some predators will attack and kill something (poultry, i.e., chickens, ducks, quail, turkeys, squabs), and what predator is reasonable for it? Let's look at the usual suspects and see what telltale sign they leave.

## Raccoon:

Fearless, good climbers, and incredibly strong. Because they are good climbers, they can and will climb all over a pen to find a weak spot in the fencing to break through. Once inside the pen area, they will try to find an entrance to the chicken coop or grab a chicken inside the pen if it is daytime. The raccoon will only grab one bird and kill it. The raccoon will eat the head and then start on the breast, leaving the rest for later. It will be filled up with this amount for a while. It will return, and when it does, it will take another bird unless the chickens are cooped up, and then it will

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find something left on that dead bird.

The solution is to trap the animal with either foothold, body-gripping, or cage traps. Set the footholds or body-gripping traps outside the fence, away from where your birds go. Cage traps work very well inside the fenced area where your birds are. If the raccoon killed one of the birds, use that bird set inside the cage trap close to where you found it. The raccoon knows where he left it and will want to finish eating. Cover the cage traps to keep the birds from going in and getting caught, or during the daytime, shut down the cage traps and reopen them once the birds go back in the chicken coop for the night.

#### **Mink & Weasel:**

It is said that weasels are nature's killing machines. I had a job once where a weasel got into a chicken coop and killed 50 Rhode Island Reds in one night. I also

had one get into a quail raiser's farm and do the same thing with 75 quail in one night. In both cases, the weasel didn't kill them to eat them; it killed them to shut them up, and it was a killing frenzy.

The weasel will grab the bird and bite the back of the bird's neck breaking its spine and sucking out blood. If this happens, check out the back of the neck for the tell-tale sign.

The mink is also killing machines on chicken, but I find them where they tend more to head for pheasant and quails. On birds like chickens, they will bite the heads off and eat them, or they will bite the bird's throat and consume their blood.

The solution here is to trap this animal with either foothold, body-gripping, or cage traps. Find the entrance point where this guy is coming from because it will be back, and if you can find where

it entered, you will have a better chance of catching it. Using a dead bird works well, but adding a small amount of gland lure to the bait also helps. A weasel box with snap traps works well and is safe around the inside of the chicken run/pen area. Cage traps work very well, baited with either muskrat or beaver liver. Cover the cage traps so the chickens don't see and bother them. As for body gripping or foothold traps, keep them on the outside of the pen. A flat set with a small amount of food lure on the backing of the foothold works well. Small mink boxes with #110, #120, or #160 body gripping traps work well. Use fresh beaver or muskrat for bait.

#### **Skunk & Opossum:**

Usually, skunks and opossums are lazy animals and would rather

*Continued on page 26*

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## ***USUAL SUSPECTS:***

*Continued from page 25*

er eat eggs or dead birds. They're more scavengers than killers, but skunks tend to attack young or sick birds. They're like weasels. They attack the head and neck of the chicken and usually tear the neck of the chicken, killing the bird.

Conversely, the opossum is a scavenger looking for chicken feed/grain, eggs, or a dead bird. If it finds a dead bird, it will open the bird from the back end and start eating it from the intestine to the inside.

The solution here is to trap this animal with either foothold, body-gripping, or cage traps. Both animals are diggers, so finding where they came in should be easy, as well as a place to put your trap. Sometimes, opossums will stay in the area close by, including in the pen area or under the chicken coop; check this over before setting traps. Both skunks and opossums are easy to catch in cage traps. Either put the traps on the outside or the inside of the pen. Cover the traps if they are on the inside of the pen. Use canned mackerel or dry or wet (*fish flavor*) cat food for bait and even a little fish oil as a lure for dry cat food, which works great. The juices from a can of tuna are another good lure.



The author's house cat watching over growing chicks.

### ***Fox & Coyote:***

Fox and coyotes will hide under a brush pile or lay back under cover until a chicken gets within range for it to grab and run off with it. The whole bird will be consumed with only a few feathers on the ground. If they are feeding young, they will keep coming back throughout the day and for the next week until the whole flock is gone. To solve this problem, check out the surrounding area to see if you can find the entry point where it is coming in. Once found, set several traps, including snares, for them. Make flat sets, pee post sets, and blind sets for them. I find a dirt hole set doesn't produce well because the canine concentrates on getting a chicken and doesn't care about a little something in a dirt hole.

The solution is to trap this animal with either a foothold or a cage

trap. Cage traps work well on red foxes but not on coyotes. Again, if you are going to use cage traps for that red fox, use a dead chicken if he dropped it on his way out. He'll be back for that one.

Coyotes, this guy will grab the bird and run off, eating the bird, feathers and all. Set footholds outside the fenced area to keep your birds from getting caught. Set traps if you can find where he has been hiding or where he took that bird to eat it. Make a flat set with some backing (i.e., grass pile, rock, stick) and lure the backing. Make a dirt hole set there if you find where he stopped and ate it. Use fresh meat bait such as beaver or bobcat if you have it; even a mink carcass works well on coyote.

### ***Bobcat:***

Bobcats are great climbers like raccoons and will climb a chicken





pen to get to the birds. The bobcat will grab and kill a bird right where it captured it. I had a customer who was feeding their ducks, and they had a large turkey in with them. A bobcat jumped the fence and killed the turkey ten feet in front of the customer. When it was done, it grabbed it, dragged it over to the fence, and tried to pull it over with no success because the turkey was a 25-pound tom. Bobcat kills are often easy to identify, where chickens will be dragged around partly eaten and covered with dirt and twigs. They usually pluck the breast and start eating there. They like to open the cavity and eat the heart and liver before eating the bird. They will cover what they don't eat and come back sometimes a day or two later.

The solution is to trap this animal with a cage trap inside the pen. Use the dead bird for bait; if it won't go in, use fresh beaver meat; it is a guarantee. If the bird was taken outside the pen, look for it and set a trap or two there. You could use a foothold, body gripping trap, or a snare to catch this cat. Use what's left of the dead bird, if anything, for bait. If not, throw some beaver meat in there.

#### **House Cats & Family Dog:**

House cats are usually pretty good with chickens, but now and then, one will take a small chick or pullet. Cats brought up around livestock get used to them and usually

never bother them. On the other hand, dogs are well-known killers of chickens and other poultry. Yep, your pet dog will kill chickens every chance it gets. I've seen it more than once. Your pet dog needs to be tied up if you have free-range poultry. I have seen dogs wait until a chicken puts its head outside the pen, where the dog can chew it off. That is one reason to keep your dog tied up. A dog will kill not one chicken but several at once, just for fun. Here, the law reads that you have the right to protect your livelihood, which means farming and farm animals. If a stray dog enters your property and starts killing your chickens, as long as you have the right to protect your property, I suggest you shoot the dog. If your dog kills one of your birds, chain that dog down far away from where the birds are. I know an old guy who said to stop a dog from killing chickens; he tied a dead chicken to his dog's neck and left it there until the chicken fell off in pieces over a couple of months. He said the dog never attacked another bird. Does it work? Let me know.

#### **Birds of Prey—Hawks, Falcons, Eagles:**

Birds of prey, including crows, kill chickens. Crows kill small bantam chickens and large baby chicks; keep your birds under netting or in a chicken tractor for the best results. A chicken tractor is a small 2x4x12-foot or larger box

frame screened off with chicken wire. It has a set of small wheels on one end, so you can pick up the other end and pull it around. The top is covered with sheet metal or plastic sheeting to protect the birds from predators. The same goes for a chicken run that is attached to the chicken coop. It needs to be screened off or covered on the top of the pen to protect your birds from predators.

#### **Snakes:**

Where I live, we only have garter snakes, and they usually leave birds alone. But some states have other snakes that will eat birds and their eggs. If you find a dead chicken with slime all over it like a slug, then what you have is likely an unsuccessful attempt to swallow it from a snake. Look around the area and see if you can locate the snake and remove it from sight.

Always protect your birds by fencing them in a small area, netting off above them with fine mesh netting to keep birds of prey away from grabbing them. Keep them in chicken tractors so you can move them around to better areas for them to feed. Install automatic coop doors so the predators can't get in throughout the night if you forget to shut the coop door. Trap to keep predators at bay, and don't feel bad if you must shoot the neighbor's dog. ■





# How Chat AI Programs Work

by WCT Staff

Chat AI programs, like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini, represent several of the forefronts of artificial intelligence, combining advanced technologies to generate human-like text responses.

While these programs' names are getting thrown around a lot these days, along with the discussion on whether or not they should be used, few have a good understanding of what these programs are and how they function.

To address the elephant in the room, AI programs are here to stay. They are being implemented into our lives whether we want them to be or not.

These days, you will find AI programs on everything related to communication and understanding. Have a power outage? An AI program will ask questions and route your call to the appropriate area. Need more information from a website? Just ask the AI Chat bot and it will help out. Need to find a location with your phone? Simply ask and a route will be mapped out.

Whether you view AI as Pandora's box or the next step required for human evolution, the Genie is out of the bottle, and it isn't going to be placed inside again. Potential and existing customers will be using this technology to solve their own wildlife problems, so having a good understanding of how this information is generated can help separate operators when they get to speak to the potential client.

Hence, it is often better to understand what these programs offer and how they can leverage success in a constantly changing landscape than to sit back and watch the change happen while the bank

account dries up.

While I am nowhere near an expert on the subject, here are several key points regarding how Chat AI programs work written by AI programs. Note that the responses have not been edited to allow for a good comparison of each program and while there are similarities there are also differences.

## ChatGPT

Chat AI programs, like ChatGPT, represent the forefront of artificial intelligence, combining advanced technologies to generate human-like text responses. Here's a look at how they function.

### The Core Technology: NLP

Natural Language Processing (NLP) enables these programs to understand and generate text. It blends linguistics, computer science, and machine learning to process language and extract meaning.

### The Foundation: Large Language Models (LLMs)

These programs are built on LLMs trained on vast amounts of text data, such as books and websites. This training helps them learn grammar, context, and relationships between words to produce coherent responses.

### The Training Process

1. **Pretraining:** Models are trained to predict the next word in a sentence, learning language patterns and general knowledge.
2. **Fine-Tuning:** Specific datasets refine the model to ensure accuracy and alignment with desired behavior.
3. **Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF):** Human reviewers provide feedback to enhance response quality and appropriateness.

## How Conversations Work

When you ask a question, the AI analyzes your input, breaks it into tokens (small text units), and uses its training to predict the most relevant response. It maintains context across multiple interactions by referencing prior messages in the conversation.

**Strengths:** These programs excel at answering diverse queries, summarizing information, coding, and more.

**Limitations:** They can provide outdated or incorrect information, struggle with ambiguous queries, and require ethical guardrails to ensure responsible use.

## The Future of Chat AI

As training techniques and datasets evolve, chat AI will become even more capable, offering smarter, safer, and more intuitive tools for communication and problem-solving.

## Microsoft Copilot

AI chat programs, like me, use a combination of advanced technologies to understand and respond to your queries. Here's a simple breakdown:

1. **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** This is the magic behind understanding human language. NLP helps in interpreting the text input, grasping context, and making sense of grammar and syntax.
2. **Machine Learning (ML):** Over time, AI models learn from vast amounts of data. This learning process involves recognizing patterns and making predictions based on those patterns.
3. **Large Language Models (LLMs):** These are like the "brain" of the AI. LLMs are trained on diverse datasets to generate hu-

man-like text. They predict the next word in a sentence by considering the context of the words before it.

**4. Reinforcement Learning:** This involves training the AI to make better decisions through a system of rewards and penalties. This helps refine responses and improve the accuracy of the AI.

**5. Data Handling and Privacy:** All interactions are processed securely, and the AI is designed to respect privacy policies and guidelines.

Think of it like a high-tech conversation partner, constantly learning and improving to provide better and more relevant responses!

## Google Gemini

Chat AI programs, like the one I'm running on, work through a combination of sophisticated techniques:

• **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** This allows the AI to understand and interpret human language.

**Understanding:** It breaks down your text into individual words (tokens), identifies the parts of speech, and figures out the overall meaning and intent behind your message.

**Generating:** It uses this understanding to construct a relevant and coherent response in natural language.

• **Machine Learning:** The AI is trained on massive amounts of text and code. This training process helps it:

**Learn patterns:** It identifies relationships between words, phrases, and concepts.

**Predict outcomes:** It learns to predict the most likely continuation of a conversation or the most appropriate response to a given input.

**Improve over time:** As the AI interacts with more users and receives feedback, it continuously

refines its understanding and responses.

• **Deep Learning:** Many advanced chat AIs utilize deep learning models, specifically a type called **Transformer networks**. These models excel at processing and generating human language by:

**Paying attention to context:** They can consider the entire sequence of words in a conversation, not just individual words in isolation.

**Identifying complex relationships:** They can capture subtle nuances and dependencies between different parts of the input.

**In essence, chat AI programs work by learning from vast amounts of data, understanding human language, and using that understanding to generate human-like text responses.**

**Key things to remember:**

**They are not sentient:** They don't have feelings, consciousness, or true understanding. They are complex algorithms that mimic human conversation.

**They are still under development:** While impressive, they can

sometimes generate incorrect or nonsensical information. It's crucial to critically evaluate their output.

I hope this explanation is helpful! Let me know if you have any other questions.

As readers can see, while all three programs received the same prompt (the question, command, or information entered for the AI to work with), each program provided a slightly different response. This illustrates the variations in how each LLM has been "trained" and how each AI is designed to operate.

When using AI programs to research a topic, employing multiple programs with the same prompts and comparing the responses is generally more effective. This strategy will yield the best overall results for your queries. Additionally, remember that AI programs can make mistakes, so reading and editing any information before sharing it on social media, websites, and more is essential. ■



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# Is AI THE NEXT COMPETITOR FOR WCOs?

by Eric Arnold

Several weeks ago, I spoke with Dirk Shearer of The Wildlife Control Company. He was telling me about one of his daughter's friends who had a wildlife problem. As Dirk discussed the problem with his daughter's friend, she suddenly stated that she could just look up what to do. Acting on this thought, she produced her phone, opened an AI chat program, and asked several questions.

While not all of the information was potentially correct, Dirk stated that the majority of it was very similar to the advice he gives daily, raising the question of whether AI-presented information will replace the need for operators in the future.

To cut to the chase, I don't be-

lieve this will happen. However, I believe AI will impact operators, and they will need to step up their game.

A key element to remember about wildlife control work is that it is not an essential need for most of our clients. In other words, the main reason we get hired is not that we are the only ones who can do the work. Most of our clients are more than capable of doing the work, but they prefer not to. While there are many reasons for that decision, as inflation and costs continue to rise, there will come a time when more individuals start resolving their problems on their own.

This ties in directly with the fact that wildlife control services are based on disposable income, not essential income. When a client

must choose between paying their medical insurance, feeding their family, and keeping the lights on instead of removing the raccoon from the chimney, it's a no-brainer for them. They will search for what they can do and hope it works.

As training techniques and datasets evolve, chat AI will become even more capable, offering smarter, safer, and more intuitive tools for communication and problem-solving. Operators should be aware of this technology and how their clients may use it.

To help illustrate this point, I asked the top three free AI chat programs, ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini, two questions and have included their responses. These questions were asked in December 2024 using the latest versions of each program and have not been grammatically edited. I did not use the paid versions, which would potentially give even better answers, something to keep in mind. Going forward this year, I plan to ask a question or two each issue so we can see what, if anything, changes over the next year that could affect the wildlife control industry.

**Q: I keep hearing noises from my attic; what could it be?**

**Copilot Answer:**

Hearing noises from your attic can be unsettling! There are several potential causes for these sounds:

**Temperature Changes:** As the weather fluctuates, materials in your attic can expand and contract, causing creaking or popping sounds.<sup>1</sup>

**HVAC System:** If your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system runs through the attic, it might be the source of humming,

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buzzing, or rattling noises.<sup>1</sup>

**Loose Vents or Shingles:** Wind or rain can cause loose soffit vents or shingles to bang against your roof.<sup>2</sup>

**House Settling:** Older homes often settle over time, leading to occasional creaks and groans as the structure adjusts.<sup>2</sup>

**Pests:** Squirrels, mice, rats, or bats might be nesting or moving around in your attic, causing scratching, scurrying, or gnawing sounds.<sup>3</sup>

Would you like some tips on how to investigate and address these noises?

**Editor's Note:** The following websites with linked pages are listed as the footnotes with this answer.

1—[www.housedigest.com](http://www.housedigest.com). Per their About page, House Digest is a webpage that offers the latest news and expert advice on real estate, remodeling, design, DIY projects, gardening, and much more. Go to <https://www.housedigest.com/1228343/here-is-why-you-might-have-noises-in-your-attic/> to read the linked information.

2—[housenotebook.com](http://housenotebook.com). A site created by Jose Perez about his experiences, insights, and discoveries while building his own home in Delaware. This is the link to the referenced page: <https://housenotebook.com/why-does-my-attic-make-noises/>.

3—[www.atticsolutionsusa.com](http://www.atticsolutionsusa.com). Attic Solutions, an insulation company in Oakland, California, advertising rodent proofing and insulation services. The page discusses rats, mice, squirrels, bats, and snakes. Some of the information presented is good, while other parts are not. You can read the referenced page at <https://www.atticsolutionsusa.com/noises-in-the-attic-the-most-common-attic-pests-and-how-to-get-rid-of-them/>.

## ChatGPT ver. GPT-4.5 Answer:

Noise from the attic can be caused by various factors. Here are some possibilities:

### 1. Animals or Pests

**Rodents:** Mice or rats are common attic inhabitants. They make scratching or scurrying noises, especially at night.

**Squirrels:** Active during the day, they may create thumping or rolling noises.

**Bats:** Flapping or chirping sounds, often heard at dusk or dawn.

**Birds:** Nesting birds can create rustling or chirping sounds.

**Raccoons:** These larger animals may make loud thumping or dragging noises.

**Insects:** Carpenter ants or termites may cause faint rustling sounds.

### 2. Structural Issues

**Expansion or Contraction:** Wood and other materials can creak due to temperature changes.

**Loose Materials:** Debris or insulation shifting around can cause sounds, especially during windy weather.

### 3. HVAC System

If your HVAC system runs through the attic, it could be making noises due to air pressure, loose parts, or expansion/contraction of ducts.

### 4. Plumbing

Pipes running through the attic may make knocking or dripping sounds, especially if water is flowing or temperatures are fluctuating.

### What You Can Do:

**Inspect the Attic:** Use a flashlight to check for signs of pests (droppings, nests, or chewed materials).

**Listen for Patterns:** Note the time of day and type of noise to help identify the source.

**Set Traps or Call Pest Control:** If pests are suspected, humane

traps or professional exterminators may be needed.

**Check for Structural Problems:** Look for loose boards, damaged insulation, or shifting materials.

**HVAC or Plumbing Check:** If you suspect mechanical issues, consult a professional.

## Gemini 1.5 Flash Answer:

Noises coming from your attic can have a few different causes. Here are some possibilities:

### Wildlife:

**Squirrels:** Common culprits, often making scratching, scampering, and chewing noises.

**Raccoons:** Larger animals, may cause thumping, rummaging, and sometimes growling sounds.

**Bats:** Usually heard fluttering or chirping, especially at dusk and dawn.

**Rodents (mice, rats):** Scuttling, squeaking, and gnawing noises are common.

**Birds:** If you have a nest, you might hear chirping, flapping, and pecking.

### Structural Issues:

**Settling:** As a house ages, it settles, which can cause creaking, groaning, and popping sounds.

**Temperature Changes:** Wood expands and contracts with temperature fluctuations, leading to cracking and popping.

### Plumbing Problems:

**Water Pipes:** Expanding and contracting pipes can make ticking or tapping noises.

**Leaks:** Dripping sounds might indicate a leak in the plumbing system.

### Here's what you can do:

#### Investigate:

**Listen carefully:** Try to pinpoint the location and timing of the noises.

**Visual inspection:** If possible, safely enter the attic and look for

*Continued on page 32*

## AI Q & A:

*Continued from page 31*

signs of animal activity (droppings, nests, chewed wires).

Check for entry points: Look for holes, gaps, or openings around vents, chimneys, and rooflines.

### Consider the source:

**Wildlife:** If you suspect wildlife, contact a professional wildlife removal service.

**Structural issues:** Consult a qualified contractor for inspection and repairs.

**Plumbing problems:** Call a plumber to diagnose and fix any leaks.

**Important Note:** If you're unsure about what's causing the noises, it's always best to consult a professional to avoid any potential risks.

My next question had to do with removing squirrels from an attic. Again, I asked the same question using copy and paste to ensure no difference.

### Q: How to remove a squirrel from my attic?

#### Copilot Answer:

Removing a squirrel from your attic can be a bit tricky, but here are some humane and effective methods you can try:

**1. Identify Entry Points:** Look for any holes or gaps where the squirrel might be getting in and out. Cover these with steel mesh or hardware cloth.<sup>1</sup>

**2. One-Way Exclusion Door:** Install a one-way exclusion door at the main entry point. This allows the squirrel to leave but not re-enter.<sup>1</sup>

**3. Ammonia and Bright Lights:** Place rags soaked in ammonia or bright lights in the attic to make it uncomfortable for the squirrel.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Disturbance:** Make noise by banging on the ceiling or playing loud music to encourage the squir-

rel to leave.<sup>3</sup>

**5. Professional Help:** If the above methods don't work, consider contacting a professional animal control service.<sup>1</sup>

Once the squirrel is out, make sure to repair all entry points and clean up any nesting materials to prevent future intrusions.

Does this help, or do you need more detailed instructions on any of these steps?

#### Editor's Note:

1—YouTube linked to [https://youtu.be/27Mnwls1ASg?si=OKbqszh-QC\\_4yhyy2](https://youtu.be/27Mnwls1ASg?si=OKbqszh-QC_4yhyy2).

2—www.wikihow.com linked to <https://www.wikihow.com/Get-Rid-of-Squirrels-in-the-Attic>.

3—www.thespruce.com linked to <https://www.thespruce.com/get-squirrels-out-of-the-attic-2656730>.

#### ChatGPT ver. GPT-4.5 Answer:

Removing a squirrel from your attic involves several steps to ensure it's done safely and effectively. Here's a guide:

#### 1. Confirm the Presence of a Squirrel

Look for evidence such as droppings, chewed wires, or nesting materials.

Observe the type of noises (squirrels are active during the day, unlike rodents that are nocturnal).

#### 2. Find the Entry Point

Inspect your attic and the exterior of your home for holes or gaps (often near eaves, vents, or chimneys).

Squirrels can fit through small openings, so look carefully.

#### 3. Use Humane Methods to Remove the Squirrel

**One-Way Exclusion Devices:** Install a one-way door or exclusion funnel over the entry point. This allows the squirrel to exit but not re-enter.

**Live Traps:** Set up a live trap baited with peanut butter, nuts, or seeds. Once trapped, release the

squirrel at least 5–10 miles away to prevent it from returning. Check local wildlife laws before relocation.

#### 4. Encourage the Squirrel to Leave

**Noise:** Play loud music or use ultrasonic repellents in the attic during the day.

**Light:** Bright lights in the attic can make the environment less appealing.

**Smells:** Place natural repellents like vinegar-soaked rags, peppermint oil, or predator urine near the nest area.

#### 5. Seal the Entry Points

Once you're sure all squirrels are out, seal the openings with:

Steel mesh or hardware cloth.

Expanding foam for small gaps.

Ensure vents are covered with durable screens.

#### 6. Clean and Repair

Remove nesting materials, droppings, and damaged insulation.

Disinfect the area to prevent odors and diseases.

#### 7. Call Professionals if Needed

If you're uncomfortable handling the situation or if the problem persists, contact a wildlife removal specialist. They can ensure the squirrels are removed safely and legally.

Let me know if you need help with specific steps!

#### Gemini 1.5 Flash Answer:

Removing squirrels from your attic can be tricky and sometimes requires professional help. Here's a general approach, but remember safety and humane practices are key:

#### Confirm the Presence and Identify Entry Points:

**Listen:** Pay close attention to noises (scratching, scampering) to pinpoint their location.

**Inspect:** Look for signs of entry

*Continued on page 34*

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**AI Q & A:***Continued from page 32*

(holes, gnaw marks) around vents, chimneys, and rooflines.

**Choose a Removal Method:**

**Exclusion:** This is often the most humane method.

Seal all entry points except one. Use steel wool, mesh, or specialized exclusion devices.

Leave one open for the squirrel to exit.

Monitor activity. Once you no longer hear noises, seal the final entry point.

**Consider Professional Help:**

**Wildlife Removal Specialists:** They have experience and the right tools to safely and humanely remove squirrels.

**\*\*They can:**

Assess the situation accurately.

Determine if there are babies present.

Remove the squirrels safely.

Seal entry points to prevent future infestations.

**Important Notes:**

Never attempt to harm or trap squirrels yourself. This can be dangerous and inhumane.

If you suspect baby squirrels are present, do not attempt removal yourself. Contact a wildlife professional.

**Prevention is key:** Seal all potential entry points to deter future infestations.

**Disclaimer:** This information is for general guidance only. Always prioritize safety and consider consulting with a wildlife removal professional for the best course of action.

Both of these questions have some interesting answers. I am especially surprised that Copilot added footnotes with linked information for both questions, while ChatGPT and Gemini did not. It also needs to be pointed out that AI programs will give a different answer each time a

question is asked and that you can further refine questions while interacting with the program. This can provide unique answers for each situation when AI chat software is used. Also, as the programs learn from each interaction, a question asked and answered today may have a more detailed or better answer later on.

Regardless, these two questions show the importance of knowing what AI programs are selecting to answer wildlife problems. It will be interesting to see how this technology changes over time. ■



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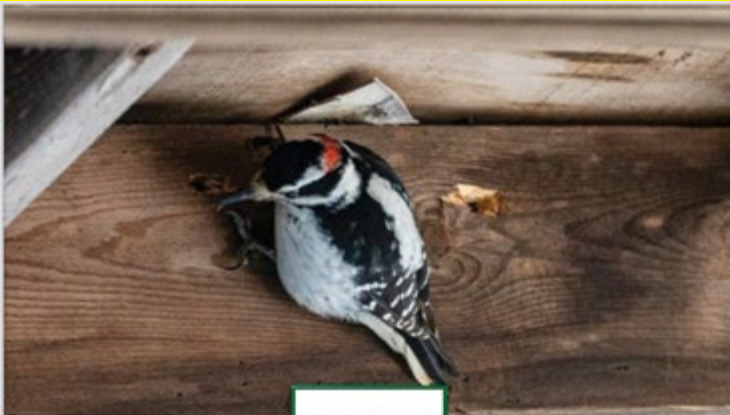
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