

Ground
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Creatures

Landscape
Architect
Quarterly

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THE CUTEST NUISANCES

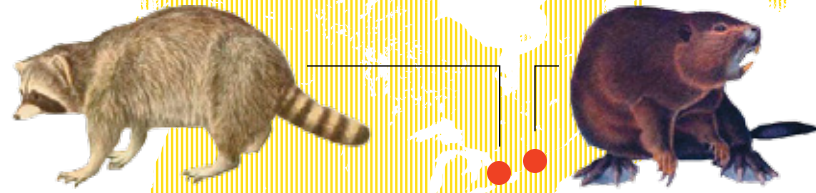
TEXT AND COMPILATION BY EMILY WAUGH

Nuisance urban wildlife species highlight the conflict between human interests and the natural world. Many of these opportunistic species are attracted to cities by plentiful resources. Some (for example, London's red foxes) have migrated to cities as their natural habitats are threatened by human populations, some are introduced (Hong Kong's macaques), and, for some, the city has gradually expanded into the animal's natural habitats (Mumbai's leopards). All have adapted to life in the city, and we have adapted to life with them.

They are often cute and fun to watch. In some cases, they are the beloved iconic animals of their regions—until they start to damage our property, threaten the safety of our children and pets, and otherwise inconvenience our urban lifestyles. Then, they become nuisances and must be controlled with extreme and/or controversial methods, such as “contraceptive” pigeon lofts in Paris, snipers to kill foxes in London, and massive culls of kangaroos in Canberra, Australia.

These so-called “nuisance” species cause severe damage to our designed landscapes, require expensive physical interventions, and force us to question what our threshold for ecological diversity within the city is.

When does a creature become a nuisance and what do we do about it?



Toronto, Canada

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Estimated Pop. 100,000-200,000

Problems Caused

These masked creatures have become the unofficial symbol of Toronto—the raccoon capital of the world. Despite their cultural status as mascot and symbol, raccoons have irked city residents with nightly domestic disruptions: upsetting garbage bins, nesting in attics, chewing through screen doors, fighting, and digging up gardens. Their roundworm larvae-laden feces can be harmful to children and pets. As these highly adaptable animals become more entitled (I have had more than one raccoon let herself into my home), 52 percent of Toronto residents surveyed support a raccoon cull.

Extreme Measures

Control methods include: limiting access to food waste, custom locking mechanisms on compost bins, and live trapping by private companies. One frustrated resident attacked a family of raccoons with a shovel and has since been charged with cruelty to animals, issued a fine, and ordered to perform 100 hours of community service. In the midst of whispers about culls, Toronto's mayor, John Tory—who jokingly equates feeding raccoons with high treason—has launched a war on “raccoon nation,” including the introduction of a \$31,000,000 “raccoon resistant” compost bin program.

Ottawa, Canada

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

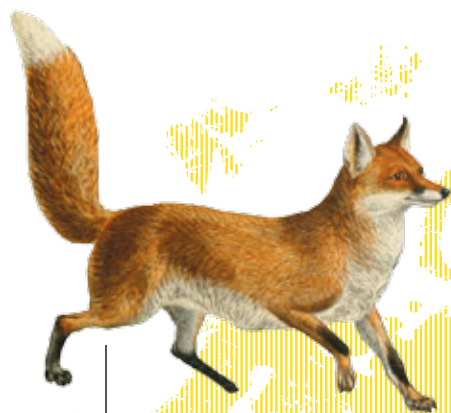
Estimated Pop. 2,500-5,000

Problems Caused

The beaver is the national emblem of Canada. It is featured on our currency, on our first stamp in 1851, and is an official symbol of sovereignty (via Royal assent in 1975). But these semi-aquatic rodents can be destructive. Although beaver dams are responsible for creating and maintaining much of Ottawa's 500-sq-kms of biodiverse wetlands, they also interfere with municipal infrastructure—blocking culverts, drains, stormwater management ponds, and even flooding land and roads. And, of course, cutting down city-planted trees.

Extreme Measures

City-hired trappers kill approximately 150 beavers annually. The practice is widely protested by advocacy groups, residents, and local farmers. There is a plan to implement more “beaver deceivers” (engineered pond-levellers, diversion dams, and constructed fences around bridges and road culverts), but many feel that the management plan is timid and cannot handle the growing population of urban beavers.



London, England

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Estimated Pop. 10,000

Problems Caused

After London's postwar suburbs crept further into their rural surroundings, London's newly minted urban foxes adapted well to city life. They share sidewalks with pedestrians, ride escalators, and even allow themselves to be petted. Their offences range from minor—digging up gardens, scattering garbage, screeching at night—to more problematic—attacking pets and chewing through brake lines on cars. Recently, they have also snuck their way into a few rare, but media-friendly situations that heighten the illusion of their threat: one fox was found napping on a filing cabinet in the Houses of Parliament, another broke into the grounds of Buckingham Palace and reportedly killed some of the Queen's pink flamingos. In 2010, 9-month-old twin girls were mauled in their cribs, and a 4-month-old boy had his finger bitten off in his home in 2013. Urban foxes are also to blame for an increase in mange, a skin disease that affects pet dogs.

Extreme Measures

While some feel that the media and the fox-hunting lobby are trying to "reinvent the fox as a pest," others find the nuisance very real and have hired private snipers to shoot foxes. Other means of control include eliminating food sources and den opportunities.



Paris, France

Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Estimated Pop. 80,000

Problems Caused

Known to many in Paris as "flying rats," pigeons—and, more specifically, pigeon poop—have become a major civic nuisance in the City of Light. Pigeon feces causes minor irritations like unsittable park benches, but also major heritage concerns as many of the cities' historic limestone buildings and monuments have been severely damaged by the acid content in pigeon poop.

Extreme Measures

Feeding pigeons in Paris is forbidden by law and could cost "*nourrisseurs*" up to €450. The city has also introduced €20,000 contraceptive pigeon lofts in its parks and gardens. These 5m-high structures encourage pigeons to nest, but discretely shake their eggs to prevent them from hatching.



Moscow, Russia

Wild Dogs

Estimated Pop. 30,000-35,000

Problems Caused

Moscow's stray dog population has been alive as long as the city itself. At a density of about 32 per square kilometre, these dogs are everywhere—in the streets, institutions, apartment courtyards, and even riding the metro (some getting on and off at their regular stops). The stray dogs are (mostly) beloved by most Muscovites, but official numbers from 2008 report 20,000 attacks on humans.

Extreme Measures

In the Soviet era, stray dogs were routinely captured and killed. Today, animal control methods are more humane, but most of the money the government allegedly spends on shelter and sterilization programs remains unaccounted for. Some joggers carry sausage and pepper spray to ward off attacks, while Internet-based vigilante "dog hunters" have taken it on themselves to "clean the city of the fanged pests" by setting traps of poisoned meat in city parks. This controversial method is dangerous to the city's pet population and a survey shows that only 9 percent of Russians support dog hunting.

Chicago, USA

Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

Estimated Pop. unknown

Problems Caused

These storybook fluffballs are a nuisance to local gardeners and city planners alike as they gnaw their way through the city's flowers, shrubs, and trees. A large population (some call it an infestation) of rabbits in Grant Park has cost the Park District tens of thousands of dollars replacing and protecting vegetation. Soon after the opening of Millennium Park, rabbits caused more than \$100,000 worth of damage to the park's vegetation.

Extreme Measures

In major parks, bunnies are trapped and released into nearby woods, and trees are shielded. Cold winters knock out about 70 percent of the population each year, though the rabbit's off-referenced reproductive rate tends to balance this out. Diseases such as tularemia and a population of 2,000 coyotes assist in rabbit management, as well.

Mumbai, India

Leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*)

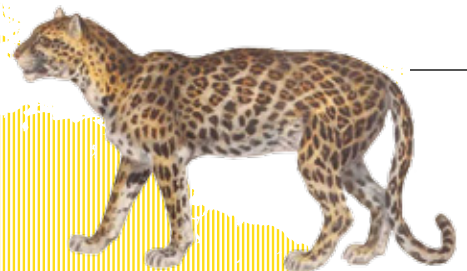
Estimated Pop. 21-35

Problems Caused

Mumbai's exploding human population has pushed the city's western suburbs into one of the largest protected urban forests in the world. The 250,000 Mumbaikars who live within the boundaries of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (and the more than one million people who live around its borders) understand that they share the territory with its original residents—251 species of birds, 50,000 species of insects, and 40 species of mammals. Leopards are routinely found in slums, residential complexes, and schools, and although these big cats can usually co-exist with human residents, there are increasing reports of attacks, with six fatalities reported since 2011. A 2015 study showed that pet dogs make up nearly 25 percent of leopards' diets in the area.

Extreme Measures

Most measures are about learning to live with these big cats, avoiding contact, and remembering that mere sightings don't equal danger. Other recommendations include: playing loud music from mobile phones when walking at night, avoiding after-dark outdoor bathroom visits, accompanying children, especially at night, keeping garbage under control, and kenneling barking dogs (who attract leopards from up to 400m) far away from homes.



Hong Kong, China

Rhesus Macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) and
Long-tailed Macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*)
Estimated Pop. 2,000

Problems Caused

After years of being fed a diet of junk food by humans (whom they now pursue aggressively to get food), Hong Kong's macaques have become obese, lazy, and aggressive. Even renowned primatologist Jane Goodall was reportedly ambushed by these little monkeys while picnicking in a local park.

Extreme Measures

A feeding ban has been in place since 1997, which carries with it a maximum 10,000 HKD (\$1,685 USD) fine for anyone caught feeding macaques. After failure to properly enforce the ban, the government has turned to birth control—trapping female monkeys to perform sterilization surgeries.

Tokyo, Japan

Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
Estimated Pop. 36,400

Problems Caused

Japan's increasing waste production combined with a 2012 law requiring clear garbage bags has led to a huge growth in Tokyo's population of crows. These large (they can be up to almost 60cm long and have a wing span of more than 1 metre) and intelligent birds routinely attack people, cause electricity blackouts by nesting in utility poles, and disrupt broadband service by stealing fibre optic cable to build nests.

Extreme Measures

Trapping in 3- by 6-metre structures in city parks and then gassing to death; using yellow plastic garbage bags, which crows cannot see through; placing wire mesh over curbside garbage bags to keep beaks out; deterring with falcons; and working with crows' eating habits by collecting restaurant garbage at night rather than in the morning, when crows typically venture out to feast. The experimental Ginza Honeybee Project repels crows using 300,000 honeybees who are known to aggressively attack shiny black objects.

Canberra, Australia

Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*)
Estimated Pop. 30,000

Problems Caused

Kangaroos are national icons of Australia. Though, as Sam Vincent of *The Monthly* writes, "We like the kangaroo on our coat of arms, but aren't so pleased with it on our roads." With more than 5,000 annual traffic accidents involving kangaroos, 17 percent of Canberra's drivers report having collided with a kangaroo at some point. The (over) abundant population of grey kangaroos is also blamed for threatening small grass and woodland species, and for degrading the kangaroo's own grass-land habitats.

Extreme Measures

The main method for dealing with the kangaroo population is highly controversial "conservation culling." In 2015, cull contractors were licensed to kill more than 2,400 kangaroos in the Australian Capital Territory. Though some of these contractors report receiving death threats from local animal rights activists, a government survey shows that 86 percent of residents agreed that culling was appropriate under certain circumstances.

