

RACCOON

Procyon lotor

Raccoons occur throughout the United States, with the exception of arid regions of the Southwest and portions of the Rocky Mountains. Raccoons are found throughout Louisiana in a variety of habitats, from pine and hardwood forests to coastal marshes.

Raccoons are easily recognized by the prominent black mask that extends across the face, along with the blackish and yellowish rings that encircle the heavily furred tail.

At one time, raccoons ranked as one of our states primary furbearers, with a recorded take of 821,733 pelts in 1917. Changes in the fur industry have caused this number to decline considerably over recent years, however. The 2011-2012 recorded take for raccoon pelts was 7,273. Many buyers who clean and process the meat of freshly caught raccoons will receive more value for this product than the hide itself.

Raccoons produce one litter annually, with mating occurring from December through March. Young are born in late April or early May after a 63-day gestation. Litter sizes usually number three or four young.

The omnivorous eating habits of raccoons are one reason they are so successful in establishing themselves over large areas. In coastal areas, they feed on crawfish, crabs, snails, clams and small fish. In agricultural areas, they feed on corn and a variety of other small grain crops. Frogs, earthworms, insects, acorns and berries, along with the shoots and buds from various plants, all are part of their diet.

A common misconception is that raccoons wash their food prior to consumption. Although they frequently drink water when consuming food, they rarely will carry food to a water source, even if one is nearby.



Conflicts with raccoons occur when poultry and eggs are destroyed around farms. Their effects also can be felt with wild bird populations, especially our eastern wild turkey. Corn and watermelons are two farm commodities often targeted by raccoons. Damage around homes and outbuildings occur when raccoons seek to gain entrance to attics or chimneys or when they raid garbage in search of food.

Raccoons also are one of the major wildlife hosts of rabies in the United States, primarily because of their increased numbers across the eastern United States.

Control measures

In Louisiana, raccoons are considered quadrupeds with no closed season. They can be taken at night by one or more licensed hunters with one or more dogs and one .22 rim-fire firearm. On private lands, there is no bag limit for nighttime or daytime raccoon hunting during the open trapping season. Bag limits for the remainder of the year are one raccoon per person per day or night.

A valid trapping license, in addition to a basic hunting license, is required to pelt and sell raccoon skins and carcasses during the open trapping season. The selling of pelts and carcasses is illegal during the closed trapping season.

In addition to shooting, raccoons are relatively easy to trap in either wire-cage live traps, leg-hold traps or Coniber® body-gripping traps. A type of “arm-hold” trap designed specifically for trapping raccoons is called the “Grizz-Getter®” is widely used by both fur and nuisance trappers and its design greatly reduces the capture of nontarget species. When baiting either wire-cage traps or Grizz-Getter traps, any type of fish, meat product or even dry dog food will serve as an attractant.

Although expensive, electric fencing can be used to exclude raccoons from fields and buildings. To be effective, electric fences should be erected with two wires, one being 6 inches from the ground and the other a foot higher.



Raccoon trapped in wire-cage live trap



Grizz-Getter© arm-hold raccoon trap

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