

Instructor Introduction

Protecting Wildlife (Grades 3-5)

Students will learn about conflicts with local wildlife, why these conflicts exist, and basic humane solutions for protecting local wildlife while keeping them out of our homes.

Excerpts from the MSPCA's Statements of Belief:

“The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals believes that all animals exist in a dynamic state of interdependence with their environment, and that no animal is inherently a “nuisance” or “pest” animal. However, because their habitats are increasingly altered or managed by humans, certain wild species — or individual animals — may, because of their number, natural behavior, or presence in an inappropriate location, pose a significant problem for or threat to humans, other animals, or the environment.”

“The MSPCA believes that wildlife control programs should employ the most humane and least intrusive means for addressing wildlife problems. Programs employing preventative steps are most desirable. In most instances, the most effective approach to wildlife control is manipulation of the environment by such means as removal of food sources or prohibiting access rather than moving or destroying animals.”

The following bullets list the important elements behind this lesson plan. For more information on any wildlife questions, please visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, a companion program to the MSPCA, or contact an MSPCA Education Coordinator.

- many communities in New England have small pockets of woods intersecting with residential areas; this means that many wild animals will cut through residential areas to find more open, rural areas in which to live
- urbanization as a whole has resulted in fewer locations for local wildlife to establish their homes, which is another reason they settle in residential areas
- relocation of wildlife is illegal in Massachusetts because it can spread disease, including rabies
- when wildlife is relocated it is away from familiar territory and therefore has a lower chance of survival because it does not know where to find food, water, or shelter; a new ecosystem is threatened with the introduction of unfamiliar predators and prey
- there are private companies that “eliminate pests” for the public; this disposal is supposed to be done humanely, but there is no guarantee that these guidelines are followed
- elimination is not an effective solution to conflicts with wildlife; usually, it simply “frees” a spot for another animal to come along and possibly upset a natural balance
- the most effective solutions for managing conflicts with wildlife are the humane solutions: simply put, making the environment unattractive to the animal so it leaves on its own

- for humane solutions to common conflicts with wildlife, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org

- in instances where injured wildlife is suspected, it is best not to touch the animal
 - injured wild animals can be very dangerous, so it is best not to approach them
 - keep pets and children away from the animal
 - contact your local wildlife rehabilitator, police department, or animal control officer for assistance

- in instances where orphaned wildlife is suspected, it is usually best to leave the animal alone unless it is in imminent danger
 - parents often leave their young alone while searching for food or building shelter
 - wait from a safe distance and keep an eye on it; the parent will usually return within hours
 - touching the young may deter the parent from returning if it smells human scent
 - it is a myth that handling a baby bird will cause the parents to abandon it- however, they should only be handled in cases of imminent danger (for instance, if a fledgling has fallen from the nest and is in a dangerous situation)
 - if you notice a nest on the ground, it is okay to pick it up and place it back where you suspect it has fallen from (low tree branch)

Humane Education Lesson Plans

Lesson Title: Protecting Local Wildlife (Grades 3-5)

MA Curriculum Strands:

Science Frameworks:

Biology 3-5 (Structures and Functions, Adaptations of Living Things)

3. Recognize that plants and animals go through predictable life cycles that include birth, growth, development, reproduction, and death.

7. Give examples of how changes in the environment (drought, cold) have caused some plants and animals to die or move to new locations (migration).

8. Describe how organisms meet some of their needs in an environment by using behaviors (patterns of activities) in response to information (stimuli) received from the environment. Recognize that some animal behaviors are instinctive (e.g., turtles burying their eggs), and others are learned (e.g., humans building fires for warmth, chimpanzees learning how to use tools).

10. Give examples of how organisms can cause changes in their environment to ensure survival. Explain how some of these changes may affect the ecosystem.

Comprehensive Health Frameworks:

K-5, 13.1 Describe types of natural resources and their connection with health

K-5, 13.2 Describe how business, industry, and individuals can work cooperatively to solve ecological health problems, such as conserving natural resources and decreasing pollution

K-5, 14.2 Identify ways the physical environment is related to individual and community health

Lesson Summary:

Students will learn about conflicts with local wildlife, why these conflicts exist, and basic humane solutions for protecting local wildlife.

Preparation: time to make copies, print photos, collect “trash” and other materials

Lesson Time: 1-3 lessons, each lasting 45-60 minutes

Materials:

- white board and markers
- “dangerous trash” materials that are hazardous to local wildlife: 6-pack rings, rubber bands, plastic bags, fishing line, cans with lids only partially removed, other materials
- small recycle bin, a garbage bag, and small trash can with a lid, bungee cord, can opener
- photos of local wildlife
- images of a chimney, a dryer vent, a trash can with the lid off, a flower bed, underside of a porch (optional)
- coordinating handouts for students (optional/ to chose from)

Discussion Outline:

Local Wildlife

Begin with a discussion reviewing wild versus domestic animals, and the various habitats where wild animals live.

Ask

- what species do we see in this area of Massachusetts (bats, chipmunks, deer, fisher cats, foxes, gopher, mice, opossum, rabbits, raccoons, skunks, turtles, woodchucks, etc.).

These can be listed on the whiteboard and photos of these species can be passed around the room for students to see.

Conflicts with Wildlife

Once students have brainstormed a list of local wildlife, continue the lesson and discussion by asking the following leading questions to get them thinking about conflicts with wildlife and simple, kind solutions to keeping them out of our homes and yards.

During the discussion, it might be helpful to show them images of a chimney and dryer vent as potential “nesting” spots for animals. These can be covered with wire mesh to keep animals out (just make sure there aren’t any babies inside during nesting season before it gets sealed up!). The image of an open trash can and the flower beds should be described “buffets” for wild animals. Covering the lid securely will keep animals out. Planting unpleasant tasting flowers will discourage deer and rabbits from chewing them.

Ask

- Why do we sometimes see these animals in our own backyards?
 - Many communities in New England have small pockets of woods that intersect residential areas. This means that many wild animals will cut through residential areas to find more rural and woody areas to live. Plus, there used to be a lot more woods for animals to live in than there are now, which means that sometimes animals will build homes in our backyards, because there used to be woods there. Sometimes these animals live in our trees or underground in our yards, but sometimes they crawl in the walls or build nests in our attics, basements, or patios.
 - When communities are developed, wildlife is misplaced. We have encroached on the habitats of wildlife and disturbed their ecosystems by removing natural predators and prey.
 - We provide wildlife with consistent food sources from our trash, bird feeders, etc.
- What do you think this town looked like 100 years ago?
- What kind of animals lived here?
- We want wildlife to have a home, but we don’t want them to invade our homes. What do we do?
 - We need to live together! (not in the same house, but we do need to coexist...)
 - There are many solutions, but some are better than others.

- The not-great solutions include inhumane (cruel) practices: sometimes animals are killed by being poisoned or trapped in steel leg traps, both of which can result in a slow and painful death.
- Sometimes animals are moved to another location, which is bad for the animal because when they are moved they don't know where to find food or shelter, and they don't usually live very long.
- The better solutions are humane (kind) solutions that make your home either difficult to get into or seem unappealing (like a place they wouldn't want to live). For example, there are often lots of small openings that animals might use to get into your house. Families can seal these holes (often vents) with wire mesh to keep animals from getting in their homes. This is a humane solution to getting your home free of wild animals.

Show images of a chimney, a dryer vent, a trash can with the lid off, a flower bed, and the underside of a porch to get students thinking about how these can be “homes” or “buffets” for wild animals

Ask

- Can you think of some other humane solutions?
 - playing loud music will often make animals leave when they are living in the walls, and then vents can be sealed with wire mesh
 - using cayenne pepper around your garden will help keep rabbits from nibbling
 - patch holes in the exterior parts of your house that might look like a nesting spot for a wild animal
 - keep trash lids covered and secure to keep animals from trying to get in your trash
 - feed pets inside so their food spills don't attract wildlife
 - holler outside before you let your pet out to scare away skunks, coyotes, etc. to protect them and your dog

Keeping Wildlife Safe

The last part of the discussion should encourage the students to think about how to be safe around wild animals and keep them safe as well. This is a great time to show the “dangerous trash” items and ask students to think about ways to safely dispose of these materials and keep them out of harm's way.

Ask

- When is it okay to handle or feed wildlife? (Never!)
 - if you think an animal might be hurt or orphaned, it is usually best not to move it or touch it; instead, have an adult call a wildlife specialist to describe the situation and they can tell you what to do
 - wild animals should never be kept as pets; it is very stressful for wild animals to be confined and they can be dangerous to humans
 - it is best to let wildlife find their own food; if you feed a wild animal, it may depend on you for food or try to nest close to your house, which is not best for you or the animal
- What are some dangers that local wildlife face because of people?
 - traffic (hit by car)

- trash and pollution; their feet and necks can get caught in plastic or wire trash, especially six-pack rings, metal cans with the lids still attached, and fishing line
 - poison; fluids like motor oil or antifreeze might be left out and a wild animal can drink it and get sick
- What can we do to help?
 - ask our parents to drive slowly and keep an eye out for wildlife
 - recycle as much as we can, and dispose of our trash safely in covered containers (cut rubber bands and 6-pack rings, for example, and remove lids to metal cans completely before recycling them because animals can easily get their heads jammed in them)
 - keep all hazardous materials in sealed containers away from where an animal might find it

Demonstrate how to safely discard of trash & recyclables by cutting 6-pack rings and rubber bands before disposing of them, and by completely removing the lid on a metal can before placing it in a recycling bin; show how to dispose of trash and tie the bag securely; place trash bag in a trash bin and use a bungee cord to secure the top

Humane Learning Outcome

“Wild animals have a right to a safe existence. We have a responsibility to keep them safe while finding humane solutions to keeping them out of our homes. It is important to respect wildlife and make sure they have a chance to make a life for themselves in their natural habitat.”

Activities:

Handouts: “Is This Really Fair?” Story (MSPCA/ AHES)
Living with Wildlife Brochure (MSPCA)
 “A Sign You Care” (Kind Teacher, Volume 26)
 “A Tale of Two Critters” (Kind Teacher, Volume 27, 28, 29)
 “Give Wildlife a Brake” (Kind Teacher, Volume 29)
 “Nature’s Nests” (Kind Teacher, Volume 29)