

## 6-7-18 Rodents and Raptors

Ever hear of “secondary poisonings”? That is what happens when we poison one animal and, while it is still alive with the ingested poison, another animal eats it. This is a widespread occurrence affecting our raptors (hawks, owls, eagles) and mammals, such as foxes.

This issue hit home for me when I read of the sad news of the death of a Snowy Owl at the wonderful Wild Care, Inc., a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation center in Eastham. The rescue was in response to a call reporting an owl appearing to be ill or injured in Wellfleet. It clearly was dehydrated and had many bruises. Was it injured? Bloodwork revealed the real culprit. It had ingested rodenticide.

Remember, all those words ending in “cide” mean that it kills. We know that when we read homicide but the same applies to herbicide, pesticide, fungicide, and rodenticide.

Unfortunately, when people kill the unwanted mice, rats and chipmunks, moles and voles, those rodents become easy prey for the best rodenticide program out there. Owls, hawks and foxes depend on those small rodents for a large portion of their diet. When we poison the rodents, we take the chance of poisoning someone’s cat or dog and these magnificent wild creatures. Please spread the word to stop this insanity of the easy kill with poisons and the pretend game that no other harm is happening.

But I get it; people don’t want mice in their house and they want to know how to get rid of them. While you might need assistance from professional wildlife handlers and/or exterminators to rid your attic of bats or a nest of raccoons, you can save yourself a lot of money by handling a mouse problem yourself, without pesticides!

Begin by assessing the situation. And then start thinking like a mouse. Where are you seeing evidence? Look for their tiny, slender pointed droppings.

Next, think about how they entered your house. They usually gain entry to the above ground part of your home by following pipes and conduits. These little pathways lead to your stove and sink and baseboard heaters through holes in the wood. These should all be closed by stuffing them first with some steel wool or metal scrubbing pads, pulled apart into thin sections and pushed far into the hole with something very slender, such as tiny screw driver or sturdy wire. Then, seal the hole with spray foam insulation, after reading the directions, for it is very sticky stuff and expands far more than you think it will.

It is applied with a straw that is attached to the spray can. You need to stick that straw into the hole and spray only a tiny bit of foam. At first it comes out shaped like the straw and it can pull away and move around, like a fatter version of “silly string” or “party string”. You can be fooled into thinking you filled the hole when you later see this big chunk of hardened foam. You’ll be very impressed with your work and not realize that behind the big lumps are little

holes. When it has completely dried and hardened you can cut off the excess and see if there are any holes needing more. Silicone caulking is also a good alternative.

The stove is a favorite entry point but don't pull out your stove if it is a gas one, even if it has a flexible connection. Instead, go down cellar and find where the pipe leads up to it. Then use the same method for plugging that hole. While down cellar, look around for any evidence of droppings; areas where they might enter and food supplies that might attract them, such as pet food, grass seed or bird seed. Throw away damaged supplies and store the replaced food in metal containers with tight fitting lids.

Once the entry holes have been filled, you must consider the possibility that you may have done such a great job, that there are now some mice stuck in your house. Now it is time to consider how to get rid of the unwanted guests. I am skipping right over the recommendation of many pest control companies, that of poisoning the mice. Oh, they might not call it that; the poison containers are usually referred to as bait stations. The bait is poison. Think about that. Who wants a poisoned mouse dying in their house, in some unknown location, where it will release its fleas and mites, and later giving off a putrid odor, attracting ants and flies? Or, if you used the Poison Stations outdoors or in your garage or cellar, that mouse probable went outdoors where it can then be eaten by raptors or mammals, either wild or domesticated.

Thinking about trapping instead of poisoning? If you decide to use a live trap, make sure you take them for a long ride into the country, away from other homes before releasing. Then, there are sticky traps. They are effective but inhumane. The mouse slowly starves to death and will probably be alive when you have the duty of disposing it. If you choose to kill the mouse, the old fashioned spring-loaded trap works very well. Place those traps baited with some food perpendicular to the wall where you have found droppings. Place them in pairs so that if one does not work, the other will. Nesting material such as thread, shredded paper or pulled apart wool is also very attractive to mice. They love old cloth oven mitts; they smell like food and are soft like pillows.

It is unpleasant work, to be sure, this rodent ridding project, but it will be low cost compared to hiring someone, you will be getting rid of disease carrying animals and by refusing to use poison, you are helping the best exterminators to live.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. She welcomes your ideas and comments and can reach her at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*