

Conservation Comments

By Paul M. Kelsey
New York State
Division of
Fish and Wildlife
Coons and Skunks in the Corn
The home gardening boom should be gratefully accepted by coons and skunks which roam suburban backyards on summer nights unknown to human dwellers. Both critters are surprisingly common in cities and villages, and will live in perfect harmony with humans—corn and garbage pails excepted—if only humans will let them. With sweet corn just becoming ripe, the presence of these nocturnal phantoms will suddenly become apparent, through many not

acquainted with their night raids may blame neighborhood boys for the thievery. Most small garden pests, including rabbits, skunks, and woodchucks, can be kept out of the garden with a two-foot high chicken wire fence. This, however, doesn't even offer a challenge to a raccoon unless there is an electric wire along the top. Another style electric fence which seems effective can be made with light wire and a cheap electric fence charger. Two wires are strung, one four inches above the ground, and the second four inches above that. One thing that must be remembered when operating an electric fence is that it can be easily shorted out

by vegetation, so plants along the fence line must be constantly groomed. The use of repellent sprays to protect garden produce has always been a rather "iffie" thing, but several years ago Dr. Eugene Swanzy reported he had been very successful in repelling the coon invasion of his corn with commercial pet-repellent spray. A quick shot of spray on the stem near the husk of every second or third plant did the trick for about a week if it was not washed off with a heavy rain. Because of their potential value as furbearers, coons and skunks have been maintained on the protected list. This protection, however, is extended to them

only so long as they stay out of trouble. When they actually cause damage to property, the owner is permitted to destroy them without a permit. When neighborhood dogs and cats are not endangered, a number two steel jump trap is the most efficient control. Where the gardener has little or no control over domestic animals that travel through his garden, a live trap is advisable. When trapping, it is nice to know whether to expect a skunk or a coon. The skunk, lacking the agile hands of the coon, leaves much more shredded hucks on the ears that he eats than does the coon.

Fortunately a skunk is much easier to release than most people visualize. Get a large canvas or sheet of black plastic, and walk very slowly toward the trapped skunk, holding the material up in front of you as a shield. If at any point the skunk begins to take offense and starts humping up his back and tail, back off a little and give him a chance to calm down. Common sense says to keep your guard up. Upon reaching the trap, cautiously lower the material over the trap. Place a dark box at the end of the trap, opening the door so that the skunk can seek the security of the box. Close the box and gently carry it to the point of release, just as gently opening the box

and letting him walk out in his own good time. Often, men wishing to train their coon hounds are willing to help control coons. The Conservation Law provides that, in the case of coon doing damage, a person with the written consent of the landowner may destroy them for the owner. The law also provides that animals taken under this authority must be burned or buried so that the hides may not be sold. If a landowner does get someone to clean out the coons with their dogs, the local Environmental Conservation Officer should be informed beforehand so he can be forewarned.

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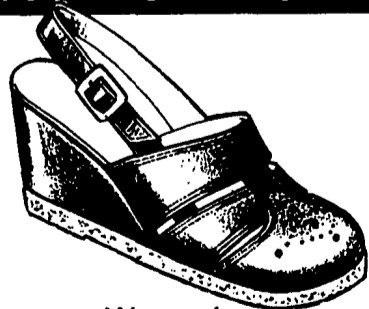
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