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Wild Things: Winterize for Wildlife

BY MARGARET BAIRD

When the frost hits the pumpkin, we humans aren't the only ones who seek out a warm, dry place to hunker down or snuggle up. A bit of loose siding or a hole in a roof may as well be a welcome mat for our wild neighbors, too. Opportunistic creatures are more than willing to take advantage of such entryways—and soon squirrels, raccoons, bats, and other critters are home for the holidays.

Breaking up a gathering of party animals in the attic is one problem the police won't help with, so frazzled homeowners often turn to their local animal shelter for advice instead. As with most wildlife conflicts, prevention of home invasions is worth a pound of cure—and many a good night's sleep.

Spotlight the value of thorough home inspection and repair at this time of year, and you'll save time and trouble later for shelter staff manning the switchboard. Here are some quick tips to offer on wildlife-proofing a home:

- Outside, look for holes or cracks that could allow animals to enter (anything larger than one-fourth of an inch), and check for loose siding and holes at the roof line. If you're unsure about in-

specting those high areas yourself, hire someone to do it for you.

- Indoors, take a good look in the attic, basement, crawl spaces, or other areas not often entered. Inspect first with the lights on, and then shut them off to look for places where daylight shines through. Also look behind appliances or where pipes enter the home, and don't forget the all-important chimney flue—a favorite nesting spot for raccoons.
- Before sealing anything, make sure no animals are already inside. Plug holes loosely with insulation, paper, or cloth. Then wait a few days. If a plug is disturbed, contact a local wildlife rehabilitator or visit wildneighbors.org for humane ways to encourage animals to leave.
- Once everybody's out, it's time to make repairs such as capping the chimney, caulking small holes, filling cracks with expanding foam, and stuffing spaces around pipes with copper wire mesh.

Remind constituents that wildlife-proofing efforts will also reap savings on winter heating bills.

"Wild Things" addresses wildlife questions often fielded by shelters and animal control officers. For more tips on handling encounters with wild animals humanely, visit humansociety.org/wildlife.

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