

## Ch. I: Introduction

### Learning objectives

- 1.1 *List four of the issues addressed by the “best practices” approach.*
- 1.2 *Name at least two reasons why an animal would be considered “nuisance wildlife.”*
- 1.3 *Explain what attracts wildlife to a particular site. Can you sum it up in two words?*
- 1.4 *How might a client’s feelings about wildlife influence the way you approach that job? Give one example of when you might not be able to follow a customer’s request.*

### What’s this all about?

This training manual has three goals: to help you learn the best practices for nuisance wildlife control, to guide you to useful information sources, and to help you pass the state certification test so you’ll qualify for a nuisance wildlife control license.

What’s a “best practice”? It’s an effective method for solving a nuisance wildlife problem that also minimizes risks to the environment and our health and well-being. This decision-making strategy balances concerns about safety; the humane treatment of wildlife; practicality; landowner rights; the protection of wildlife populations and habitats; and ethical, legal, financial, and aesthetic issues.

There is no “magic pill” for nuisance wildlife control. No single, simple remedy that can be relied upon to solve all of the problems you’ll encounter. At times, you may even need a different solution for the “same” problem. Your favorite method for removing a raccoon from a chimney may not work at this particular house, for example, because the roof is too rotted to walk upon. One customer’s definition of best practice may differ from another’s, too. Often, effective long-term solutions involve the use of several best practices, such as a combination of removal and exclusion. So there’s another reason to master many techniques and have a variety of tools available.

Best practices are based on the best available information, which includes scientific knowledge and the field experience of wildlife biologists and nuisance wildlife control operators (NWCOs). As we learn more and refine the tools and techniques of the trade, best practices just get better and better. That’s why we urge you to keep learning throughout your career. For

example, you may wish to join a professional organization that puts you in touch with other NWCOs, or read magazines and listserves.

From time to time, you may want to check the online version of this manual, which will be updated more frequently than the printed one. It also has color photographs showing typical wildlife damage and wildlife sign. You’ll find it at <http://wildlifecontrol.info>.

### How to use this manual

This manual was written in a format that works for many people. If it doesn’t match your learning style, ignore it and follow your own methods. How you learn the material doesn’t matter much; what counts is how well you master the subject.

Each chapter follows this format

- Learning objectives (shown in italics)
- Chapter text
- “Higher, deeper, further”: some optional activities to help you explore other perspectives about the topic (shown in a shaded box)
- Summary
- Review questions (also optional)

Chapters four and five cover a lot of material, so we’ve broken them into sections. You may wish to tackle them one section at a time.

If you’re an experienced NWCO, you may already know much of the material covered in this manual. If you’d like to save time, here’s a way to gauge if you’re ready to take the test. Review the table of contents. Feel that you know enough about these topics? Then read the learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter. Do they make sense to you? If so, then flip to the end of the chapter and try the review questions. If you can answer most of them correctly, then you may be ready to take the test right away. *The certification exam is linked directly to the learning objectives.* If you master those points, you should pass the test.

For those who want to work through the manual in depth, here are a few ideas that should help you work smarter, not harder. First, before you launch into the chapter, read the learning objectives. They may not make sense yet but even so, they’ll give you a sense of what’s coming and what matters most. The learning objectives are repeated at the end of the chapter, and

by then you should understand them. If you stumble over one, re-read that section of the manual. If there's a term you don't know, check the glossary (Appendix A). When you're done reading the chapter, answer the review questions, which will help you decide if you mastered the material.

This manual is meant to be useful after you've passed your exam, too. The appendices include species accounts. Each account summarizes basic biological facts and control techniques for that species and was written specifically with NWCOs in mind, to answer questions that other sources don't address. Use them with your favorite field guides and other materials. You'll also find lists of equipment suppliers, professional organizations, government agencies, and resources such as websites, trade magazines, conferences, books, videos, and other materials.

### **The DEC, wildlife, and you**

Wildlife belongs to all New Yorkers—that's the law. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is the steward of this resource. The DEC has five major goals for its wildlife programs: "1) to ensure that New York's wildlife populations are managed to meet all the demands placed upon them; 2) satisfy public requests for information about wildlife, its conservation, use, and enjoyment; 3) provide sustainable uses of New York's wildlife; 4) minimize the damage and nuisance caused by wildlife and wildlife users; and 5) foster and maintain an organization that efficiently and effectively achieves our goals."

Where do NWCOs fit in? In the past, government agencies and Cooperative Extension staff handled most wildlife complaints. But the demand for these services grew at a phenomenal rate, far outstripping the agencies' abilities to respond. NWCOs met the need. From the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, the industry grew over 300% in New York, according to Cornell researchers. Now, many nuisance wildlife complaints are handled by NWCOs.

That doesn't mean you work for the government. You don't work for the DEC; you're a private businessperson. Still, this is an important partnership. And because the DEC licenses all NWCOs in New York, your actions reflect on the agency.

Other people are also critical to the DEC's efforts to manage wildlife, including hunters, trappers, and

wildlife rehabilitators. Game species are managed primarily through hunting and trapping. Annual, regulated harvests are one of the most practical ways to manage wildlife populations and prevent conflicts with people.

Wildlife rehabilitators rescue and care for orphaned, sick, or injured animals, hoping to release them back into the wild. (Some rehabbers donate their time and pay for their supplies, while others run nonprofit organizations to support the effort.) Wildlife rehabilitators provide an important supplement to the DEC's efforts, which are generally focused on the health of populations, not individual animals. Without these volunteers, the DEC might need to divert resources that are needed elsewhere.

Nuisance wildlife control operators, trappers, hunters, and wildlife rehabilitators all deal with the DEC, mostly through its Bureau of Wildlife. Each group is heavily regulated but different laws apply. For example, wildlife rehabilitators are not allowed to charge for their services, while NWCOs are.

There are natural connections between these groups, especially because some people belong to more than one of them. Many people who belong to these different groups care deeply about wildlife and work for its conservation.

The public also takes great interest in the treatment of wildlife, according to many surveys, but opinions vary dramatically. For example, some people may be opposed to regulated harvests on principle and may never have considered how these harvests help to prevent wildlife conflicts. The public doesn't necessarily appreciate the contributions of trappers, hunters, NWCOs, or rehabbers. Especially in urban areas, you may be the first—or only—"wildlife person" your customer ever meets. It's something to think about. Some people assume that anyone holding a trap is a trapper, or that everyone who uses a firearm is a hunter, so whether or not you intend it, your actions may reflect on many others. What you do today could influence what you are allowed to do in the future.

There's another way that NWCOs, in their daily work, contribute to statewide efforts to manage wildlife. After suffering damage or a nuisance situation created by wildlife, some people may become hostile to the presence of wildlife and may no longer want to support

habitat protection efforts. For them, wildlife has lost much of its value. By solving wildlife conflicts, NWCOs can help maintain public support for wildlife and habitat protection.

### **Why them? Why me?**

Most wild animals just mind their own business and never cause a conflict with people. In fact, many people deeply enjoy their interactions with wildlife. This manual focuses on those wildlife species that are more likely to come into conflict with people. In the Northeast, this includes about three dozen species out of hundreds of species of mammals, birds, and reptiles (listed in the table of contents and App. B and C).

When does a wild animal become a nuisance? Are certain species always nuisances while others never

### **Setting a trap doesn't make you a "trapper"**

NWCOs and fur trappers use some of the same equipment but there are important distinctions between these groups. Both are forms of regulated trapping but different laws apply. NWCO work isn't restricted by trapping seasons. However, NWCOs can't use or sell the fur of the nuisance animals they've trapped—unless that species is in season and the NWCO also has a trapping license.

Trapping is a tool for NWCOs, not "the" tool. Just look in the truck! Sure, there are traps, but you could also find catchpoles, hardware cloth, checkvalves, expanding foam sealant, and chimney caps. That's because NWCOs are there to fix a problem. To do this, they'll probably trap animals, but not always; they might repel or exclude the animals.

NWCOs use cage traps much of the time, while fur trappers most often use foothold or body-gripping traps. What they hope to capture differs, too. They usually target different species and fur trappers don't deal with birds or snakes at all. There are only a few species that both groups might handle, such as raccoons, skunks, beaver, and muskrat.

One of the easiest differences to spot is location. Most NWCOs work in urban or suburban areas and often set traps inside a building or on the roof. Fur trappers usually trap in rural areas and more natural habitats.

qualify? There's no universal answer because people react differently to wildlife. Consider a huge population of Canada geese in a city park. Their droppings foul lawns and ball fields. Some people are concerned about catching diseases from the birds; others feel they've been deprived of the use of the park because it's disgusting. One group may seek a strategy for controlling the goose population but another may be feeding the birds during lunch breaks. They enjoy this daily contact with nature and may react angrily to any attempt to remove the geese. Who decides what to do?

In New York, landowners have the right to decide whether or not a particular animal is a nuisance, although for some species, the law does set standards. (See chapter three and the "legal status" section of the species accounts in Appendices B, C for details.) If public health or safety is threatened, a public official may also act. That's the law. But it doesn't mean that if someone has (in your humble opinion) overreacted, you can't talk to them and try to help them see the situation in a different way. We hope you will.

For most people, "nuisance wildlife" means an animal is destructive or menacing. The animal may be damaging property such as buildings, crops, pets, livestock, gardens, or public parks. Wildlife may threaten human health or safety by spreading diseases; through direct attacks; or accidentally, because of collisions with cars, airplanes, or trains.

According to a 2001 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office, collisions between deer and cars cause over \$1 billion of damage each year. Worldwide, another billion is lost each year due to birds colliding with airplanes. Beavers, woodchucks, squirrels, and other species cause additional millions of dollars of damage to roads, bridges, dams, and electrical utilities. Estimates for the damage to U.S. agriculture range from \$600 million to over \$1 billion annually, with over half of all farmers and ranchers experiencing some type of wildlife-related damage each year. (From "Wildlife Services Program, Information on Activities to Manage Wildlife Damage," GAO-02-138.)

Some nuisance species may even threaten the survival of other wildlife, or destroy their habitats. That's a significant concern in areas with endangered or threatened species. One of the most dramatic examples of this happened in Guam, when the brown tree snake



**NWCOs solve mysteries.** Sometimes the problem is obvious, such as the raccoon in the bedroom. The nest in the attic fan poses a fire hazard (blades can't move so motor overheats), but there are also young squirrels in the nest. See the mothballs in the damaged gutter? That's a clue to a failed control attempt. Investigation is the first step in the best practices approach.



was accidentally introduced onto the island. Studies proved that this snake eliminated ten of the island's thirteen bird species, half of its lizard species, and two of three bat species, according to The Nature Conservancy. (It has also killed many pets and bitten children.) Here in New York, researchers worry about raccoons and gulls preying on the eggs of the endangered piping plover. A disease spread by raccoons is believed to be one of the reasons why we lost all of the Allegheny wood rats in the state. Are some of our rare wildflowers disappearing because there are so many white-tailed deer eating them?

Often, species are not viewed as pests in their normal habitats but may clash with people when they enter our world. How many people worry about a skunk in the woods? Yet a skunk under the porch is an entirely different matter.

These animals aren't maliciously trying to annoy people. To a large degree, we've created this problem. People turn wild animals into "delinquents."

Many wildlife conflicts can be explained with two words: food and shelter. Provide them intentionally or accidentally, and some wild animal will probably accept the invitation. Surprised? As human development spreads, wildlife conflicts happen more frequently. The competition for natural sources of food and shelter increases, enticing some animals to seek

their living in our world. At the same time, some species adapt to these new opportunities so well that their populations rise dramatically, further increasing the chance of a conflict with people.

Hunting and trapping may help reduce wildlife populations and alleviate some of these problems. However, if the damage is caused by species that aren't normally harvested, such as red squirrels, or if the problem's in an urban area, or if it's happening outside of the regular harvest season, other control methods will be necessary. That's where NWCOs fit in.

### **The other half of the business**

"Half your business is wildlife—the other half is people," advises one professional. Your success will probably depend as much on the way you talk to customers and treat other professionals as the clever ways you assess situations or modify cage traps.

As you're asking your customers questions about the job and describing the options for solving the problem, you'll probably gain a sense of your customers' values and how they want situations handled. In most cases, you'll be able to tailor your services to meet their needs, but there are two times when you can't: if doing so would violate a law, or when public health or safety is threatened. You are legally required to follow the health department's directions about what to do with captured animals (in addition to DEC rules). If the health department wants an animal killed and tested for rabies, you must do this, even if your customer requested that you use only nonlethal techniques.

That explains why you'll probably get to know some health department staff, but you're likely to interact with many other professionals on a fairly regular basis, too. Some may assist during an emergency, such as the local police and animal control officers.

Many seasoned NWCOs advise new professionals to develop networks right from the start. Win the trust and respect of your regional DEC wildlife and law enforcement staff, local police, animal control officers, health department staff, wildlife rehabilitators, veterinarians, staff at local animal shelters, town clerks, and your fellow NWCOs. You're probably aware of the practical reasons to maintain friendly relations, but this is also an excellent opportunity to market your business. Often, people don't know who to contact for help with a nuisance animal so they may turn to

any professional who works with animals or enforces laws. If you win the trust and respect of these professionals, they may refer customers to you.

Wildlife control is not a nine-to-five job, especially during the busy season. Some people refer jobs to other NWCOs when they're too busy to handle them. Or maybe you're suddenly confronted with a nine-foot long snake in someone's apartment, and you're not quite sure what it is. (Except big. Really big.) You may want to call a buddy who's more experienced with exotic species. Some NWCOs partner with construction professionals, too. Maybe you'd rather remove the bats and leave the repair work to someone else, so you're not tied up at one site for several hours.

These examples point to one aspect of professionalism: recognizing your level of technical expertise and making sure that you have the skills and knowledge needed to do a job well. There's a bit more to it, of course, and we'll highlight some of those issues in chapter six.

### Higher, deeper, further...

*Optional activities to explore other perspectives about the topic.*

- Check a few websites that relate to wildlife damage management, such as the Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management (see Appendix E).
- Review the websites of a wildlife rehabilitation group, a trapping organization, and an animal welfare organization. How do their perspectives about the control of nuisance wildlife differ from your own? Consider joining and participating in their activities.
- Develop a presentation for a local school class to explain what a NWCO does at work. (You don't have to actually present it, just consider how you'd describe your job to a six-year-old).
- Get to know other NWCOs. Join your state wildlife control association, or sign up for a listserv, or attend meetings and conferences.

## Summary

Before you answer the review questions, you may wish to think about the learning objectives:

- 1.1 List four of the issues addressed by the "best practices" approach.
- 1.2 Name at least two reasons why an animal would be considered "nuisance wildlife."
- 1.3 Explain what attracts wildlife to a particular site. Can you sum it up in two words?
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## Review questions

Optional. Answering these questions should help you decide if you learned the material well enough.

1. To qualify as a nuisance, an animal must
  - a) take up residence in someone's attic
  - b) damage a crop (agricultural, fish stocks, forestry, nursery)
  - c) cause an accident
  - d) attack a child
  - e) it depends on the species and the situation
2. Animals often enter human environments to fulfill basic survival needs. What do they seek?
  - a) food and shelter
  - b) mates
  - c) cable TV
  - d) protection from diseases
3. When providing wildlife control services, you are always required to do exactly what your customer requests. (Circle answer.)

True      False
4. What's a best practice?
  - a) it's a method that's cheap and fast
  - b) a way to solve a nuisance problem that doesn't hurt the wildlife
  - c) the simple, single solution for all the problems you'll encounter
  - d) an effective way to solve a nuisance problem that minimizes the risks to people and the environment

5. NWCOs who use the best practices approach to solving nuisance wildlife problems think about:
  - a) safety, wildlife rehabilitation, finding a quick-fix for the problem, and the DEC's goals for its wildlife programs
  - b) the humane treatment of wildlife, whether the method is practical, safety issues, and landowner rights
  - c) legal and ethical concerns, and how much this method will help increase the deer herd
  - d) costs, fur trapping, human safety, and getting rid of as many of the animals as you can to make sure the problem doesn't happen to the neighbors
  
6. You may partner with another professional to finish a job because
  - a) you don't have the proper equipment, but your roofer friend does
  - b) you're not as comfortable handling that species
  - c) it's your busiest season, and you don't have the time to spare for the building repair or clean-up services your customer needs
  - d) any of the above

*Answers:*

- 1—e
- 2—a
- 3—false. In some cases, you must follow the directions of the health department.
- 4—d
- 5—b
- 6—d