

Living with Wildlife
Conservation Corner - September 2016

Living in Ashland, we are lucky to interact with wildlife on a regular basis. The simple act of looking out your window might put you face to face with a Downy woodpecker, a black-tailed deer or a sneaky racoon. For those willing to escape the confines of town, Ashland's trails and streams can excite with sightings of cutthroat trout, Northern Pygmy Owls and the occasional run in with a black bear. In every case, it is important to remember that we are encroaching on the habitat of a different species and cognition dictates care. Below are some ways you can help preserve that which makes Ashland wild.

Deer are one example of wildlife which can make Ashland exciting for some and frustrating for others. Whether you support it or not, it is illegal to feed deer in Ashland. One form of feed we may over look are the plants we adorn our gardens with, many of which are absolutely irresistible to our antlered ruminant friends. Luckily, Oregon State University has some amazing wildlife garden resources which can be accessed by conducting a simple google search. These scientifically supported outlines provide suggestions far superior to common gardening sites, giving good advice on creating habitats which are inviting yet less susceptible to deer malevolence. Although planning a wildlife garden can require additional upfront effort, you will enjoy having plants which share an evolved ecology, tend to last more than a season and tolerate lower water use.

Another major wilderness consideration is the yearly battle many in Ashland have with mice and rats. Because these domestic pests are annoying, many reach for poison as a solution without first considering the intricate food web which exist in our wildlands-urban interface. The common anticoagulants used in modern rat poisons, namely diphacinone, bromadiolone and warfarin, make rats more susceptible to predation by wildlife. Birds of prey, especially owls, are vulnerable to these anticoagulant rodenticides (ARs). In a 2012 study by ecotoxicologist John Elliott "virtually 100%" of dead owls had ARs in their system. Further, a Journal of American Water Resources Association study in 2014 attributed elevated levels in warfarin in wheat fields to accumulation from biosolids (treated sewage sludge) application. The easiest way to ensure that these compounds do not bioaccumulate is to simply dispense with their use in the first place. While perhaps a bit more repulsive to dispense with, localized traps provide a superior anti-rodent approach and can be monitored for effectiveness and safety.

Finally, our location as a headwater to the Rogue River necessitates an enormous responsibility to maintaining pristine water quality. As you walk around Ashland, you are sure to see that storm drains are marked with small fish, a gentle reminder that a complex and delicate river ecosystem is only a short, untreated, distance away. In a 2009 study, the City of Federal way in WA found that petroleum hydrocarbons, heavy metals and surfactants all were being added to local streams in high concentrations as a result of residential car washing. These pollutants all damage micro invertebrate populations which provide the basal food source for chinook, coho and steelhead. By washing your car at a facility, which are required to treat their effluent, you provide an additional check to prevent pollutants from entering our streams.

By taking these simple steps (and others you come up with on your own), we can enjoy and conserve the wildlife, adding one important demission to that which make Ashland such a fantastic place to live.