

Things That Go Bump in the Night

By Julie Silva

It is a nice evening with a slight breeze. A cup of coffee and a piece of pie is a perfect way to end the day. Your cat was sleeping on the chair next to you, she jumps up wide eyed. Both of your dogs are on guard with low growls and their hair standing up all along their backs. Something or someone just walked in your back door.

No matter where you live, in town or out in the country, we share our land with many other species. Many of those species are moving around, eating, sleeping and checking out what we are doing. Cameras catch numerous animals as they nap on lawns, munch in compost piles and, in some cases, make themselves at home in your house.

Not too long ago a local couple had an uninvited house guest walk right through their front door. The mountain lion hit the door so hard it slammed shut, cutting off the avenue of escape. With the help of Fish and Wildlife and the Sheriff's Department, the cat escaped through a broken window, leaving all safe. While this cat made the news, there are many similar situations happening all the time.

Mountain lions and bears are strong, unpredictable animals. There are reported sightings that pop up on social media, but in reality, they are out there and closer than you think. They are hunters in search of their next meal. Our job is to be observant and calm, giving them the right of way if possible.

Gardeners enjoy many of the same things that wild animals do. BBQ grills, bird feeders, scented products, open composting, fruit, human food, and vegetable gardens are all favorites to many wild animals. In order to keep your family and property safe, keep your children and pets close. Livestock needs to be in a secure setting at night. If you want to feed the birds, it is better to do so in the winter or make your feeders inaccessible. Scented things like candles, suntan lotion, soaps, and insect repellents are enticing. Spraying bear spray around the property may be an attractant when it dries.

Gardens are like a Sunday morning buffet. Fencing is your best friend, and the higher the better. Electrified fencing helps, along with good gardening practices. Harvest fruit off your trees as soon as they are ripe; also pick up any old fruit from the ground. When choosing landscape plants, go for vegetation that deer do not prefer. Deer are the favorite prey of mountain lions, so when you satisfy one you attract the other.

Another bump in the night that we have created is neighborhood coyotes. Wildlife experts feel that people have opened the door for coyote comfort by leaving human food available in easy open garbage cans, bird feeders, pet food outdoors, and even feeding the coyotes directly. Coyotes have played an important part in the food chain by controlling rodents. There was a time when they were fearful of people, but no longer. Now, behavior changes that include

aggression to children, pets, and livestock have developed. There is not a relocation program because moving problem animals just makes them become problem animals at a new location.

The list of animals that go bump in the night is long. It is somewhat like the saying about weeds: a weed is just a plant growing in the wrong place. An aggressive animal is just in the wrong place at that moment. A wild animal that becomes too dependent often has been helped along by people. An excellent resource for information and fencing diagrams is the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. There are articles about everything from bats to wild pigs. There is a long list of plants that deer will not seek out.

We all live here together. It is how we live together that counts. By controlling our actions, we allow the wildlife to remain just what it is, wild.

Julie Silva is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. UCCE Master Gardeners of Calaveras County can answer home gardening questions by calling 209-754-2880. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.