



The Wilds of Maine

Insects, Rodents, and Small Animals ... Oh My!

[by Jack Carr, P.E., RS, LEED-AP]

What are the most dangerous animals in the wilds of Maine? Some might say moose, bear, and coyotes. Property managers might disagree. They might list groundhogs, opossums, raccoons, skunks, and squirrels. These are the pests that damage buildings and create a real nuisance for unit owners.

Most condo building committees are very diligent in ensuring the common elements are well maintained. Building envelopes are inspected for paint conditions, wood rot, deck safety, and roof surface appearance. But what about animal infestations or other forms of attack by nature? Though I strongly recommend professional exterminators deal with pest problems, it is often up to the condo board or property managers to recognize the initial signs of animal invasion.

BUILDING DAMAGE

When the thought of animals damaging buildings comes to mind, most folks think of termites. Yet termites are not a problem in Maine. Termites do not

like to cross the Piscataqua River, due to Maine's cold winters. A few termites hitchhike in firewood smuggled into Maine by campers "from away." Fortunately, these termites do not make it through the winter.

Black carpenter ants are a different matter. These pests are bred local and are hearty Maine creatures, and they are always looking for a good home to eat. They particularly like wet wood. This creates a double-jeopardy problem because when you find you are infested with black ants you will likely find you also have to deal with damp or rotting wood trims, sills, or siding.

Signs of wood damage are often very subtle. It could be new wood sawdust in unexpected places or wood that seems to have a hollow sound when tapped. Sometimes nature lends a hand by having other creatures point out you have an insect problem. If unit owners are complaining about the noise woodpeckers are making banging on the building's corner boards, even to the point

of making sizeable holes in the wood trim or siding, it can be a sure sign the birds heard insect activity in the building envelope and are exploring for food.

Rodents are another source of problems. Field mice are always trying to get inside. They nest in fiberglass insulation so when you see signs of insulation disturbance in the attic or basement, it is a sign. Rodents in general have fast growing teeth causing them to gnaw on everything, including electrical insulation, to keep their teeth short while sharpening them. Flying squirrels and red squirrels are the worst as they seem to enter attics through even the smallest gaps in roof eaves or vent louvers. Oddly enough, bats are a nuisance not from the damage they cause to buildings but the smell and possible diseases they bring into the structure.

Raccoons and opossums are great climbers and, like all animals, will follow the food. Be careful about birdfeeders and garbage storage. I recall one large building I inspected that was to be

converted into a condominium. It was a grand old building with seven chimneys. We found a dead raccoon in five of the chimneys. Groundhogs and other digging creatures may seem harmless but they can dig tunnels near the foundations, allowing water passages that can cause settlement or other structural problems.

RESIDENTS BEWARE

Pest detection is not all about buildings. It is also about protecting the inhabitants of the buildings. Some communities are having serious problems with Canadian geese. These noisy creatures look lovely gliding across a condo complex's pond but their droppings have resulted in many ponds and lake beaches in Maine this past summer to be closed by health officials due to E. Coli levels in the water. These geese are difficult to get rid of once they find a food source. Interestingly enough, they like short lawns with open space. By allowing the grass to grow over 6 inches and thereby creating barriers to limit line of sight of potential predators, the birds will leave for a better environment.

And finally, while Maine mosquitos are justifiably dreaded, perhaps the most dangerous of all animals in Maine is the lowly deer tick. Climate change is allowing this creature to thrive in the summer and survive the Maine winter. It is responsible for an epidemic of Lyme disease. They can be found in the tall grass at the borders of the complex or along the nature trails in the woods or even in the flower garden. Condo boards should give this matter serious consideration in terms of boundary spraying or other means to protect the community from this very real threat.

In summary, don't feed the animals. Either with your buildings or food scraps. Remind the unit owners not to attract animals to the condo grounds. This summer saw a steep spike in rabid animal attacks from red foxes, skunks, and raccoons along Maine's mid-coastal areas. Forewarned is forearmed.



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