

# REMINDER—DON'T FEED WILDLIFE

Winter is here and people often are concerned about the welfare of wildlife. This sometimes leads to residents feeding wildlife such as foxes, coyotes and deer.

Wild animals suffer when they get used to eating human-supplied food instead of their natural diet. When wild animals are attracted by food, they may become habituated. The animals can lose their fear of people and pose a risk to humans, pets and themselves.

Providing artificial food sources to wildlife can result in larger litters, which the natural food supply can't support. As well, artificial food sources can result in overpopulation. Higher populations without a natural food source to support it, can lead to starvation and epidemics of disease, some of which are dangerous to humans. Wild animals can carry diseases, such as rabies, which can be transmitted to pets and humans.

Predators, such as coyotes and foxes, may also prey on smaller pets.

Feeding wildlife also attracts unnaturally large numbers of animals to the area. The congregation of animals around the food source can increase the spread of disease.

Supplemental winter feeding of deer can also result in other negative consequences.

Deer will congregate, coming in from long distances and away from good winter cover. This can increase predation and exposure to diseases such as chronic wasting disease.

You may also risk injury when you don't keep a respectful distance from wild animals. Wildlife can misinterpret your actions and you can get bitten. While foxes and coyotes may look cute and friendly, it is important to remember they are wild animals.

Feeding deer can also be an issue that is detrimental to deer populations. Deer have adapted to harsh winters by developing thick winter coats, storing fat reserves for winter, having a reduced winter metabolic rate and restricting their winter movement. Even with the people feeding them, deer will still rely on their fat reserves and will still lose weight over winter. And, although winter-related starvation can occur, trying to save them through supplemental feeding can end up causing them more harm than good. Feeding deer carbohydrate-rich food sources, such as grains, can also be fatal.

Deer are ruminants and have a four-part stomach. They rely on microbes to help digest the woody vegetation that makes up much of their winter diet. When deer eat food such as hay, which is not part of their normal winter diet, they cannot digest it and may end up starving to death.

If you are concerned about wildlife issues, you can contact your local conservation officer, area biologist or Ministry of Environment field office.

If you encounter a coyote or other predator, treat it like you would any other wild animal. If it is being aggressive or looks sick, contact the Ministry of Environment TIP line at 1-800-667-7561 or call #5555 from a SaskTel cellphone.