**Do You Know Your Wild Neighbors?**

**Common myths still confuse many people**

*The Humane Society of the United States*

Like the famous urban legend about alligators living in New York City's sewer system, some animal tales seem to take on lives of their own in the public imagination. As we pass on the falsehoods from generation to generation, it can become difficult to separate fact from fiction.

In the interests of setting the record straight, here are 10 popular myths—and facts—about our wild neighbors.

Rather than repeat myths that are best forgotten, let’s go straight to the facts you need and want to know about wildlife!

**1.** **Feeding bread to geese and ducks**

**The Facts:**  Bread offers no nutritional value whatsoever. Severe health problems, including a debilitating condition called "Angel Wing," can be caused by a diet heavy on bread. Hand-feeding leads to dependency on people for food. Ducklings and goslings will become panhandlers, and some birds may become aggressive about being fed. Fed ducks and geese can become full-time residents in local parks, where their presence may cause such conflicts that people call for their being rounded up and killed an unnecessary and avoidable human-wildlife conflict.

**2.  “Orphaned” fawns**

**The Facts:** Mother deer often "park" their babies in one place and only visit two to three times a day to avoid attracting predators. Until the fawn is four weeks old, you will rarely see the mother. Instead, the fawn relies on camouflage and lying still for protection during this vulnerable period.

**3.  Touching a baby bird**

**The Facts:** Birds do have a limited sense of smell, but they’re too strongly bonded to their chicks for them to abandon them if handled by humans. The best thing you can do if a baby bird falls from its nest is to put him right back. The parents will return. Watch carefully: they will come back and forth to feed their chicks several times an hour, from dawn till dusk.

**4.  Seeing a raccoon during the day**

**The Facts:** Raccoons will appear whenever food is around. Although they’re normally nocturnal, it’s not uncommon to see raccoons during the day, especially in spring and summer when mom raccoons are expending a lot of energy nursing their young cubs. But if the raccoon is acting disoriented or sick— circling, staggering, or screeching—contact an animal control officer.

**5.  Smelly skunk encounters**

**The Facts:**  It is actually difficult for a person to get sprayed by a skunk. Skunks only spray when they feel they need to defend themselves, such as when a dog runs up and grabs them. But because they cannot "reload" very quickly, skunks don’t waste their odiferous weapon. Instead, they will stamp their front feet as a warning to get you to back off.

**6.  Bats and hair**

**The Facts:** The last place a bat wants to be is in your hair! They navigate using a complex sonar-like system called echolocation, which allows them to "see" their world with fine precision. The misconception about bats flying toward hair is based on a bat's swooping flight patterns when they get trapped in confined spaces, such as houses. In such confinement, bats fly in an arch whose lowest point is in the middle of the room. This makes it seems that they are flying at you, but they are simply trying to stay airborne.

**7.  Letting cats roam outdoors**

**The Facts:** When you open the door and let your cat out, you are subjecting her to many perils, particularly being hit by a car. Indoor cats live a healthier and longer life. Outdoor cats, even well-fed ones, spend time hunting wildlife such as ground-nesting baby rabbits, chipmunks, and baby birds that have not yet learned to fly. Wildlife and cats are both at risk when people let their cats out.

**8.  Opossums’ bluff**

**The Facts:** Opossums are resistant to rabies, probably owing it to their low body temperature. When an opossum hisses, bares his teeth, or drools, he isn’t showing signs of rabies; he’s trying to scare off potential predators. And if the “I'm scary" act doesn't work, this nearly defenseless creature will play dead.

**9. Forgetful Canada geese**

**The Facts:** Canada geese who live in one place year-round haven’t forgotten to migrate—they’re descendants of captive-bred geese introduced by wildlife agencies over the last 50 years to create hunting opportunities. Some of them were released because people thought they’d look nice on their ponds. These transplanted geese never learned to migrate from their parents, and now they thrive in our suburban landscapes.

**10. Trapping and releasing**

**The Facts:** Relocating a wild animal is far from kind. In a strange place, the relocated animals will try to find their home, and may be killed by cars or have to fight resident animals along the way. In spring and summer, often it's a mother animal that is trapped and relocated, leaving her babies behind to starve. A far better solution is to solve the problem at its source by removing whatever is attracting the animal, such as food and denning sites.