



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Common Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Tourism and Business Development College of Business,
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Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program

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Common Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/common-raccoon-procyon-lotor/

By colliiek2

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Make like a raccoon

***Wash your hands. Wear your mask.
Be a bit mischievous and very curious.
Try to avoid being a nuisance and
trickster, and
Culture a woeful “I really am cute”
look.***

You may have had one of these critters in your back deck, looking for treats. We had a family of five. Cute, but not cute enough to feed.



Raccoon, courtesy of ODFW.

Raccoons can be large with a length up to 28-inches and weigh nearly 60 lbs. The most distinctive features are the ringed tail, facial mask, and front paws.

A dense underfur protects the raccoon against cold weather. The hind legs are longer than the front, giving the animal a high rump walking gait.

Habitat

Raccoons look for permanent water resources and large trees and can live almost anywhere in Oregon where those two elements are found. Some of your neighbors may claim that there are more Raccoons in the neighborhood than human residents.

They will often den in a hollowed-out tree. But they will also den in storage buildings, basements, attics, chimneys, and more.

Needless to say, they have adapted well to human settlements and are known for creating a fair amount of damage. Around 1,500 raccoons were imported as pets each year in Japan after the wild success of “Rascal the Raccoon” in 1977. It is estimated that these ‘pets’ caused over 30 million yen of agricultural damage on Hokkaido alone.



Raccoon in bird feeder (royalty free Unsplash)

Foraging

Raccoons have extremely dexterous front paws and long fingers that help them unscrew jars, uncork bottles, open door latches and knobs, and even complex locks.

These furry mammals forage night—it makes it easier to get into a garbage can unseen. They will also raid bird feeders, eat seemingly abandoned pet food, downed fruit and veggies, and more.

Aquatic foods are, however, their favorite. They prefer to eat invertebrates, but will eat plants, vertebrates, and stale dog food any day.

When foraging in streams, they will pick up a potential food item, examine it, and rub off unwanted parts in the water. It looks like they are washing their food (they are not).

But they are cute

Raccoons are generally not pets. With good reason. They can and frequently will create a great deal of problems if one starts feeding or housing them.

They are moody, carry a grudge, and remember details. Their emotional outbursts can lead to aggressive behavior towards pets and human owners (even if they were not involved). Their mischievous behavior often results in extensive property damage.



Raccoon under dog bowl sleeping (royalty free Unsplash)

Pet or Pest?

It is legal in some states to keep a raccoon as a pet. This practice is not recommended by most for a number of reasons. Human-created foods, such as canned pet food, can be very harmful to a raccoon (obesity and gout), and cow's milk will harm the kits.

As adults, raccoons can show aggressive behavior when their mobility is impaired, when they feel threatened, or when they are moody. They are unpredictable and resist learning commands used with more common pets.

There are exceptions however. US President Calvin Coolidge had a pet raccoon named 'Rebecca.' Rebecca had been sent to the White House from Mississippi for their 1926 Thanksgiving dinner. Instead she became the "White House Raccoon" that was known to unscrew lightbulbs, open cabinets, unpot houseplants, and walk outside on a leash.

Rabies

There are other reasons to not keep raccoons as pets. Raccoons make up nearly 30 percent of all rabies cases in the United States and can carry zoonic parasites and infectious diseases that can spread to humans and pets.

Did I mention that they bite?

These guys are smart and their bites seem to be targeted to cause the greatest pain over the longest time. One scuffle with our pet dog resulted in over 40 bites to her front leg and paw joints. Brutal and never forgotten by the dog or my pocket book.

REFERENCES:

- Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife, Common raccoon (<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/common-raccoon>) and Living With Raccoons (https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living_with/raccoon.asp)
- Critter Control, Why raccoons are considered pets and not pets.com Raccoons (<https://www.crittercontrol.com/wildlife/raccoons/why-raccoons-are-considered-pests-and-not-pets-c>)
- Wikipedia, Raccoons (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raccoon>) and Rebecca (raccoon) (...[wiki/Rebecca_\(raccoon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebecca_(raccoon)))).