

Common Raccoon

Raccoons derive their common name from an Algonquin Indian word, *aroughcoune*, which means “he scratches with his hands.” His scientific name, *Procyon lotor*, means “before” “dog” and “washer” which refers to the raccoons habit of what appears to be washing of their food in a nearby creek. Of course, he is not washing but rather to knead it and feel for inedible parts. They do not hibernate but will “sleep in” for weeks or months during very cold weather. When they are out and about during the winter, they do not feed as they carry all the nutrition they need as body fat, which can be 1/3 of their weight. They are the only mammals that can descend a tree headfirst. They do this by rotating their hind feet 180 degrees.



This raccoon was in our garden area.

Signs:

- Scratched or torn bark around a hollow tree, possibly a pile of scat – this would be their den
- Scat looks like skunks and opossums but it will be found on logs, limbs, or stones



Raccoon scratchings on a snag.

Raccoons are omnivorous, eating berries, fruits, fish, frogs, turtles, turtle eggs, invertebrates, small mammals, bird eggs, and bird nestlings. They forage along streams and will raid muskrat dens, eating their young and possibly then inhabiting their house. They can wreak havoc on our bird populations!

Raccoons are prolific, too. They will usually have 4-5 kits, born in April or May. Their gestation period is about 2 months. While the adults are near immune to predation because of the loss of the wolf and cougar, the kits are not. They can become food for owls, hawks, coyotes, fishers, bobcats, and bears.