

Raccoon

(Procyon lotor)



DID YOU KNOW:

The word raccoon come from the American Indian word *arakun* meaning 'he who scratches with his hands.' A raccoon searches in the water, under rocks and silt, using its front paws to locate and grab food.

EATING HABITS:

Raccoons look for food at night. They eat almost everything, foraging near water for frogs, fish, crawfish and eggs. They also search upland areas for fruits, nuts, birds and small rodents. Raccoons eat constantly during the summer and fall, piling on weight to survive the winter when food is scarce.

THE YOUNG:

Raccoon babies are born in April and May. Mom raccoon has her cubs in the same den where she found shelter in the winter. Three to seven young raccoons are in a litter. The babies' eyes are closed at birth, and the babies are noisy, especially at night. By 3 weeks of age, they have black masks, ringed tails and perky upright ears like the adults.

HABITAT (HOME):

In the country, raccoons live near water in woods with large, old trees. They search for food near water at night and stay in hollow trees during the day. However, more raccoons now live in suburbs and cities where they find dens in buildings and feed on garbage, compost and even pet food left outdoors.



DEFENSIVE HABITS:

A raccoon will try to escape if it is frightened. It is a good climber and swimmer. If a raccoon is cornered or defending its young, it is a fierce fighter and can seriously injure a dog or person with its sharp claws and teeth.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Feeding table scraps to raccoons in the back yard can lead to trouble. Raccoons searching for food can unlock, unlatch or untie almost anything.
- Some raccoons have a parasite that can make humans ill.
- The first part of the raccoon's scientific name means 'like a dog'; the second part means 'one who washes'.
- Although raccoons don't really hibernate, they do spend lots of time in their dens when the weather is cold and nasty. They come out to enjoy the nice weather on sunny winter days.
- While raccoons generally weigh between 12 and 25 pounds, large males may grow to 30 pounds or more.