

Wildlife in Croatan by Susanna Miller

Wildlife Management Techniques as Pest Control

Pest control can have many meanings to many people. Often it results in calling a professional or using chemicals that are sometimes indiscriminant. This month I am going to suggest a few natural options for managing species: some that are considered pests and some that help pest control. It may not be a complete fix, or even practical for your situation, but, hopefully, it will give some food for thought (or encouragement if you are already putting them into practice). You may be able to add ideas for your yard...



Dead limbs and hollows in trees are invaluable for cavity-nesting animals, as well as for birds that forage for insects. If squirrels (including the cute flying squirrels that live in Croatan), raccoons, woodpeckers, etcetera, have foraging and nesting sites, they are less likely to use your home. This tree cavity in our yard is used every year by raccoons. Please do be careful of dead limbs as they can be a danger when they drop.

Providing nesting boxes and landscaping for birds can provide nonstop insect control. Birds like this Eastern Bluebird (using a box in our backyard) eat insects nonstop, but even seed eaters will collect insects for hungry fledglings. Shrubbery and small trees provide cover for traditional nest builders. Just do a little background check on proper dimensions and placement: certain species are quite particular and you want to prevent predation while increasing fledgling success.



Rats, both native and invasive species, can be quite the damaging creatures when they move in your home. Luckily, we have a fox and owl population to help with that (I have actually seen a young fox tossing a dead rat like a toy early one morning) and we have rat snakes as well to help. This Black Rat Snake is patrolling a shed on Fort Raleigh Drive, so it is unlikely this homeowner will have any rat problems. Make sure you know this (and other) harmless species and let them go about their business.



Ants are a difficult one to control naturally... they spray formic acid that repels predators... unless you are a skink! Skinks, like this



Southeastern Five-lined Skink, feed on ants, so encourage these colorful guys... just keep your pets away as eating a skink makes for a tummy ache and vomiting!



Mosquitoes are one of the worst pests in anyone's book. If you have the open area for purple martin or bat houses, great! (They eat a lot of bugs, but do keep in mind they produce guano.) Dragonflies also eat lots of the pesky critters along with other insects. The most effective part of controlling mosquitoes is preventing their hatching. If you have any kind of

standing water that sticks around, consider netting a few mosquito fish from the lake for the area. Mosquito fish are not native, but were introduced for mosquito control. Their overall success is controversial as it may have displaced many native species, but they are here to stay. The larger females produce live young, so will repopulate if an area stays water-filled. These small fish breathe air from the surface, so do fine in unfiltered or standing water.



Spiders are both fascinating and useful. There are a myriad of shapes, sizes, colors and webs.



Many have amazing behaviors well worth exploring (like carrying babies on their backs for Wolf Spiders and changing color for Goldenrod Crab Spiders). Most especially, they are huge insect control experts. If you can tolerate the tangled corner webs, ground funnel webs and stretching orbs through the warm months, you will have 24/7 insect “annihilation”.

Wildlife management as pest control is really pretty simple (and a nice way to work with problem species, when possible). Add, control or maintain features (food/water/shelter/nesting) to attract, control or maintain wildlife. The complexities arise from unexpected or unwanted visitors and the concern or damage they can cause. Furthermore, neighbors and safety have to be considered. Everyone has their opinion and that's fine! This article just lists some possibilities and food for thought in a neighborhood that has many wonderful natural features and creatures.



All photos by Suditi, except skink and mosquito fish, sourced from internet images; and black rat snake by Serghey Siharov.