

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Is your home safe and secure from the critters?

By Cindy Kamler

During these cold winter days and nights, we all appreciate our snug homes. Our wild neighbors, too, seek warm, secure places to settle in. Mammals such as raccoons and skunks will soon be courting; pregnant mothers will look for shelter for their babies.

This is a good time to check your home for safety and security. A recent news report described how a squirrel got into a home through a stovepipe or fireplace opening. Trapped in the house, the animal caused damage as it fought to get out. The insurance company would not cover the damage.

Four-legged or winged, these unfortunate animals are unable to make their way back up and out. The length of the pipe or chimney, sharp angles and dampers make escape impossible.



CINDY KAMLER
GUEST COLUMNIST

Chimney caps and spark arresters: Not only can an animal find its way into a residence, but floating embers from a fire (particularly burning wood) can travel up and out, setting fire to a flammable roofing surface or falling into combustible material on the ground. Chimney caps or "spark arrestors" can play a critical role in the prevention of wildland fire and ignition of explosive atmospheres. Caps

for fireplace chimneys differ somewhat from caps for wood stove pipes, but basically consist of a double layer of metal mesh. They catch embers while allowing flue gas to escape. In many areas worldwide, these arresters are required by local jurisdictions or insurance companies. Has your pipe or chimney been cleaned of creosote buildup? Is the chimney or stovepipe cap free of debris such as dried leaves?

Vents, soffits and eaves: There are other ways that animals can enter your house. Many roofs contain vents installed into the underside of your home's eaves - the "soffit" - that permit fresh outside air to be drawn up from the base of your roof; hot and humid air is expelled through roof vents at the top. Weather or shifting of the building may loosen vent covers and allow animals that climb (most likely raccoons) into the vents or attic. There are some homes with vents large enough to allow birds, bats or squirrels to enter and nest inside. This would be a good time to inspect your home's vents.

Foundations and skirting: Earth movement, flooding, weather or digging may leave openings of different sizes in foundations or "skirting." Small holes can admit smaller animals such as mice, weasels or wood rats. Larger openings can admit squirrels, mink, and feral cats. At times, mammals such as raccoons and skunks dig under skirting or enlarge the small openings. They may be hunting smaller animals (skunks are great hunters of mice and voles) or looking for "nurseries" for their young. Take a walk around your building for openings in the skirts or foundation. You may find doors of delib-



Chimney caps and spark arresters, pictured here, not only can help keep the wild critters out but are crucial fire safety devices as well.



Extensive skirting damage on mobile homes can be a welcome mat for wildlife seeking shelter from the cold during the winter months.



This barn owl, nicknamed Sooty, was rescued from a large brick fireplace.

Photos courtesy of Wildcare Eastern Sierra

erately installed access spots that have been left open or damaged. Don't forget to look under open stairways or porches. There may be forgotten access points that have not been sealed.

What to do if you find unsecured openings? If animals have gained entrance through stovepipes or fireplaces, you are most likely aware of their presence. If the animal will not leave

through an opened door, give Wildcare a call and we will provide assistance in removing it from the building.

For openings in attics, roof areas, and under the structure, call Wildcare for counseling, advice and help. There are methods for determining if an animal has already taken up residence and to ensure that they are not closed in and left to die when these unwanted

openings are repaired and sealed.

Call Wildcare Eastern Sierra promptly at (760) 872-1487 for help.

(Living with Wildlife is a program of Wildcare Eastern Sierra dedicated to helping the people of the Eastern Sierra live in harmony with our wild neighbors. For further information, contact Wildcare Eastern Sierra at (760) 872-1487.)

FREE "Green Waste" Disposal

At All Inyo County Landfills on
JANUARY 18TH AND 19TH

That brittle dried out Christmas tree that is sitting next to your house really needs to find its way to the local landfill.....**SOON!** It is no longer safe to wait until spring to start thinking about trimming trees and cleaning up around your property. "WILDFIRE" is a real threat! Prevention and preparedness activities should occur year round. Take advantage of the upcoming January 18th and 19th "Free Green Waste Disposal" event by looking around your property to see what additional dead and dry vegetation can be added to your load. Removing weeds, brush, dead tree limbs, pine needles, leaves, tumbleweeds, sage brush and any other dead and dry vegetation from around our homes and properties, will help provide the defensible space that firefighters may need to protect our neighborhoods and homes. Many of Inyo County's local firefighting response partners and collaborating agencies have been extremely busy this winter conducting controlled burns throughout the Owens Valley. Inyo County residents need to continue to do their part by being diligent in vegetation management around their own properties. Keeping your home and property clear of overgrown vegetation and debris creates a buffer that will keep the fire away from your home and will reduce the risk of flying embers. The County of Inyo continues to encourage residents to be proactive in reducing wildfire risk. Waiving the gate fees at the landfill and transfer stations is an action that demonstrates the County's commitment towards helping to reduce catastrophic wildfire events within and around our communities. Please take advantage of the waiving of gate fees for "GREEN WASTE" disposal at ALL Inyo County landfills and transfer stations over the weekend of **January 18th and January 19th**. The gate fees will be waived for "GREEN WASTE ONLY". **NO MIXED LOADS!** Applicable to Inyo County residents only - Please have ID available. Commercial haulers and landscaping contractors are NOT ELIGIBLE.

Visit

http://www.inyocountysolidwaste.com/inyo_waste_locations.html

for Inyo County Landfill and Transfer Station days and hours of operation,

or call (760) 873-5577 for more landfill information.

For more Emergency Preparedness information contact the Inyo County Office of Emergency Services at

(760) 878-0120 or email Kelley Williams at kwilliams@inyocounty.us

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Northern Inyo Associates - Orthopedics is the only local multi-specialty Orthopedics practice in the Eastern Sierra, providing services at Northern Inyo Healthcare District facilities. We employ a comprehensive approach to treating the person - not just the injury or ailment - with an ultimate goal of optimizing your function and minimizing pain.

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