



## Keep Wildlife Wild



Wildlife that eat handouts, fish scraps, and trash cause headaches for **everyone** who uses the park. When we feed animals or simply leave bait on a hook or fish scraps on the ground, we create animals that will make our visit to the seashore less enjoyable. These animals learn to beg for or steal food. In the end, those animals that ate our fish scraps, went through our unsecured trash, or did tricks for a potato chip will have to be destroyed.

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### Preventable Problems

#### Property Damage:

Animals that lose their natural fear of humans will break into tents, cabins, backpacks, trash containers, and even boats, causing damage.

#### Beggar Animals:

Animals become dependent on humans for food, making it even more difficult for them to survive during the winter months when park visitation is down.

#### Poor Sanitation:

Beggars hang around where free food is available, concentrating their feces around our living areas. Animal waste may contain infectious diseases.

#### Aggressive Animals:

Having lost their natural fear of humans, animals may bite or scratch when no food is available. Bites and scratches often become infected or worse -- the animal that bites you might be rabid.

#### Problem Animals Must Be Destroyed:

Once animals learn a nuisance behavior, they will never behave normally again.

Ripping screens out of windows, approaching humans, and tearing into tents is not normal behavior.

Humans taught this to them.

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### You Can Help: It's Easy.

#### Properly store all food and bait:

During the day, put food out of sight in a beach bag or cooler, securely close the top.

At night, secure all food, including bread and chips, in a sturdy cooler with a locking lid. Raccoons are very good at opening things; don't make it easy for them.

#### Do Not Feed Begging Animals:

Rewarding a nuisance behavior perpetuates that behavior.

#### Properly dispose of ALL Trash:

Trash includes fish scraps and old bait, as well as leftover food, drink bottles, tin cans, wrappers, and anything that smells like food.

Put fish scraps in the ocean or sound away from campsites and cabin areas. Take bait off your hooks at the end of the day. (Raccoons have been known to swallow the hook along with the bait.)

Secure all other trash in containers. Take it with you when you leave the park for disposal on the mainland.

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## What is Wildlife?

Wildlife is any animal that is not domesticated by humans and that should not depend on humans for survival.

The wildlife found in and around Cape Lookout National Seashore includes wading shorebirds, sea turtles, marsh rabbits, feral horses, snakes, dolphins, and a variety of bivalves and gastropods which create seashells.

Of the hundreds of species of animals in the park, raccoons and seagulls are the most frequently fed which creates problems for us and them.

Feeding horses creates problems for the horses, whose digestive systems are not accustomed to human food or even the food of domestic horses.

We are not helping any wildlife by feeding them.

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## Raccoons



Raccoons are typically nocturnal animals that will eat practically anything, including shellfish, rodents, berries, carrion, and insects.

They are intelligent animals that quickly learn to associate humans with food and are excellent at breaking and entering.

Once the “humans mean food” connection is made, they never forget it.

## How can raccoons ruin your visit?

Raccoons are very persistent in their efforts to scavenge from humans. Returning again and again, they can keep you up all night as they noisily rummage through your gear.

They will tear window screens and chew holes in tents, backpacks, and trash bags.

One raccoon can steal all of the food out of your cooler in a few minutes.

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## Seagulls



Seagulls are intelligent birds that, like raccoons, are not picky about what they eat.

Normally they feed on fish, shellfish, carrion, crabs, insects, small birds, eggs, and small reptiles.

Once they learn to accept handouts, they can become aggressive and bold enough to take food and bait out of your hand.

## How can seagulls ruin your visit?

Gulls that lose their fear of humans can be annoying as they hang around your picnic area waiting for food.

More aggressive gulls have been known to steal sandwiches out of people’s hands and food and bait out of open containers.

Gulls rarely act alone: one gull getting food will attract others. While it is often easy to prevent one animal from stealing your food, it becomes much more difficult when there are several seagulls around your picnic area.

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## Shackleford Horses



Horses - particularly young foals - are naturally curious. It is tempting to try to touch them, feed them, or get close for a photo.

However, wild horses are easily startled: they instinctively “spook” and run, or kick and bite. Mares will aggressively defend their young. Stallions will chase away intruders including dogs and humans.

Humans or dogs can be accidentally run over, or be the unwilling recipient of a bite or kick.

These horses do not eat domestic horse feeds such as grain or sweet feed so their bodies are not accustomed to digesting these types of foods. Leaving these or other food “treats” such as apples or carrots can cause sickness or even death.

## How can you enjoy wild horses?

Bring binoculars and a telephoto camera. Watch from a distance. Give the horses the space they need to be wild.

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## Keeping Wildlife Wild

It is our responsibility to understand the problems we may have unknowingly created for others by our actions.

It is up to us to change our actions so that all may enjoy their visit to the beach.

By disposing of trash properly, not giving animals treats, and not leaving our food or bait out, we will keep our wildlife wild.

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