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When Raccoons Fall through Your Ceiling: The Handbook for Coexisting with Wildlife

Andrea Dawn Lopez
University of North Texas Press (Oct 21, 2002)
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One of this book's most important virtues is the balance that the author achieves in her approach to her subject. Her fair-mindedness lends authority to her commentary on human interaction (often dangerously close interaction) with wildlife, whether raccoons and skunks, deer and elk, or birds and bats.

That animals were here first is an ever-present theme as Lopez examines problems and suggests solutions. "You may wonder how raccoons and skunks and foxes wound up living in your neighborhood in the first place," she writes. "The truth is, they have been there all along. You see, your house is sitting on the ground that was once their home. Now, you both live in that place."

Attention to detail, and an awareness that style affects content, add depth to what otherwise might be a merely useful handbook. For instance, animals are referred to as "he" and "she" rather than "it." "I do this," Lopez says, "to remind us that all animals do have gender, and that they aren't objects." Even an occasional lapse into sentiment is excusable, since feeling amplifies her meaning.

Lopez presents a remarkable amount of wildlife information, and the book's tips are exceptionally apt, including some from folklore and some from science. In neat handbook style, the tips are repeated in list form at each chapter's end. There are a dozen ideas for discouraging deer, for instance, ranging from using blood, bone, or feather meal to putting up scare balloons. She also evaluates the solutions and includes safety cautions about using household products to deter animals.

With impressive credentials in both print and broadcast journalism, and hands-on experience managing San Antonio's Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, Lopez is an expert. Her advice is practical, reasonable, and informed.

Obviously she cannot cover all wildlife in one book, and readers might find a slip or two in her coverage; for instance, ubiquitous porcupines should be dealt with, and deer do eat roses, even thorny ones. Yet, Lopez includes most animals that humans are apt to encounter, and provides cause-and-effect explanations and sensible, specific solutions to the problems that coexistence brings.

SALLY KETCHUM (October 16, 2002)

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