



**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** A.S.K. has provided our species specific tips based off of years of field experience and reported research; we are NOT in the business of wildlife damage control and as such, are not profiting from the recommendations provided. These tips may not be all-inclusive and we recommend discussing your specific issue with A.S.K.'s wildlife biologist **(877-596-7776)**, or your local *humane* wildlife damage control specialist for further details. Using a variety of tactics usually equates to the highest success rate. All actions must adhere to Michigan law.

### **WOODCHUCK/GROUND HOG (*Marmota monax*) Nuisance Tips**

By: Sophia DiPietro



Photo Credit: Tony Northrup, 2010



Photo Credit: P. Heberlin, 2009

### **Understanding Woodchuck Behavior**

- Very adaptable; prefer edge habitat which means if you live in a development bordered by an agriculture field or forest, woodchucks will readily approach your manicured lawn to forage.
- Herbivores (no meat), prefer grasses, forbs (clover, dandelion) and a plethora of garden plants.
- Breeding season: March and April; litter size=4-6. Young are born about one month after mating. Keep this in mind when evicting!! We want to prevent orphans, even if woodchucks ARE being a nuisance.
- Woodchucks produce only one litter per year, and only about ½ of their young survive until the end of their first year.
- Young are weaned typically after about one month of nursing; this is good news! Babies mature fast which means you won't have to be patient for too long while waiting to evict!
- Burrows are common around man-made structures like sheds, garages, steps, and decks or maybe just in the middle of your lawn!
- Woodchucks are not typically aggressive and will not have any desire to become your friend; they just want to use your lawn or other man-made structures for their protection! If you spot a woodchuck that wants to come near you, and does so aggressively, this is NOT normal. Caution should be exercised.

- Woodchucks are an important component of a healthy native Michigan ecosystem. They are prey for numerous animals and their burrow systems provide shelter to many other species.
- When startled, woodchucks make a low, rapid “warble”. This IS normal.
- Diurnal (day-active). Feed mostly in early morning and evening

## Understanding the Burrow System

- Typically there is one main entrance that will have a large amount of soil spilled around the hole. There are usually 1 or well-concealed “back-door” entrances too.
- Burrows are typically 2-3 feet deep and may be complex and maze-like with multiple branches.
- In the fall, woodchucks settle in and choose a burrow that will be used as their hibernaculum (hibernation spot). This burrow may or may not be used in the warmer weather.

## When Woodchucks Do Damage

First take notice as to the time of season. Because woodchucks hibernate, damage caused by them is unlikely between early November and late February, depending on temps. Point fingers towards other species, perhaps, rabbits or deer during those months.

**The Number One Complaint:** A woodchuck has burrowed under my house, porch, into my garden, \_\_\_\_\_ fill in the blank.

**WARNING!** Before you waste your money by calling the "wildlife removal" service for a BAND-AID quick fix, consider that humane trapping will NEVER correct your problem and generally regardless of what they say, removal services tend to kill what they trap. If you DO employ a service to trap and humanely remove, we recommend that you follow the company and watch the re-release to ensure that it really takes place. It's worth it to see for yourself! Remember, A.S.K. is licensed for humane trapping services in Calhoun County and can help.

**Important "stuff" to consider:** Breeding season. Please avoid using any methods of eviction when there are dependent young. Young mature within one month of being born, so please be patient. If you orphan the young and they are retrievable, they will require rehabilitation by a licensed professional. Rehabbing is expensive, so please make every effort to avoid orphaning animals! Be aware that federal or state laws may protect some of the wildlife species that use woodchuck burrows. Before eviction, take every effort to ensure no animals will be trapped inside.

## To Close a Home..err, well, Burrow:

If there is a problem that has been incurred due to a burrow that makes it so you cannot live your life sanely, we offer some advice, but caution you to recognize that "closing" a burrow, will not erase woodchucks from a habitat-your yard- that they like. Why? They like short grass and gardens. They like the protection offered by your man-made structures.

## TIMING IS EVERYTHING!

Female woodchucks have dependent young in their burrows from late winter until spring or early summer; as such it would be inhumane to try to get them to leave during this time. Remember, young grow fast, so you can wait it out!

If you wait too late in the year, you will then impede winter survival (a burrow can serve as a hibernaculum).

The important info: the **best time to attempt eviction is from mid- to late summer or between early July and late September** in most geographic regions. Watch closely to see young leaving the burrows. You can then time your eviction to take place about 3 weeks later.

When deemed "the time", start by loosely closing in all burrow exits/entrances. Use grass clippings, shredded newspaper, or straw etc. Monitor activity; take note if materials are pushed away. If 3-5 days pass with no activity, close it up!

**If the burrow is occupied, or you're not sure, and it's not during the breeding/baby season: place clumping cat litter soiled with cat urine, or an ammonia-soaked rag into the entrances. Loosely cover entrances with soil.** The stench will bring the woodchucks out! Make the burrow undesirable by removing vegetation that is near entrances. Once you are for sure that the burrow is vacant, you can seal it.

**To properly close a burrow:** If you don't employ a little effort into closing burrow systems, they will become re-occupied. Use heavy gauge welded fencing wire (< 3 in squares). Cut into 3 square foot sections. Center each section over each entrance. Bury at least one foot deep, pinning it down if needed with landscape staples. You could also completely excavate the burrow using shovels or a back hoe. Visit the site regularly and reapply used cat litter if you notice new digging activity.

**Scare devices** may also discourage woodchucks from taking residence: scarecrows, Mylar silver balloons that can move with the wind or other similar items can be used with some success, especially if switched regularly. These devices may scare other animals' away too-like birds, so consider placement and other wildlife that frequent your yard too! Human hair may also work: collect hair from a hairbrush and place into a netted bag, like those used for onions. Dangle these bags on short bamboo (or other type) sticks near problem sites. Again, this method may also discourage other animals too.

**Garden Damage Prevention:** You may consider placing fencing around problem sites. Remember, the more fencing, the better, since we are dealing with animals that have a digging specialty. **From: Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management:** Fences should be at least 3 feet (1 m) high and made of heavy poultry wire or 2-inch (5-cm) mesh woven wire. To prevent burrowing under the fence, bury the lower edge 10 to 12 inches (25 to 30 cm) in the ground or bend the lower edge at an L-shaped angle leading outward and bury it in the ground 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm). Fences should extend 3 to 4 feet (0.9 to 1.2 m) above the ground. Place an electric wire 4 to 5 inches (10 to 13 cm) off the ground and the same distance outside the fence. When connected to a UL-approved fence charger, the electric wire will prevent climbing and burrowing. Bending the top 15 inches (38 cm) of wire fence outward at a 45° angle will also prevent climbing over the fence. Fencing is most useful in protecting home gardens and has the added advantage of keeping rabbits, dogs, cats, and other animals out of the garden area. In some instances, an electric wire alone, placed 4 to 5 inches (10 to 13 cm) above the ground has deterred woodchucks from entering gardens. Vegetation in the vicinity of any electric fence should be removed regularly to prevent the system from shorting out.

### **The REAL Solution: Habitat Modification!**

Removing tall vegetation from burrow sites helps to make them undesirable because it increases predation risk, making the woodchuck more insecure. Use this in combo with some of the aforementioned eviction methods. Keep vegetation cut low! Woodchucks do move between burrow systems-they can even smell an unoccupied burrow system that one of their kind has used-even months to years after it has been vacant! Geesh, kind of smart, huh?? In only a few minutes, they can re-open the burrow and take residence..hence, without buried fencing, you will be constantly faced with an unwanted woodchuck!

**Be Advised:** *It is your responsibility to use repellents, electric fencing, or other methods in a safe manner that is in compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws.*

### **Additional Resources:**

- Check out the online, interactive "Intruder Excluder" to help solve your nuisance wildlife issue!  
<http://support.mspca.org/intruderexcluder/>

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED>> Detailed Woodchuck Nuisance Help:

- [http://www.hsus.org/wildlife/issues\\_facing\\_wildlife/humanely\\_reducing\\_agricultural\\_damage\\_by\\_wildlife/humanely\\_reducing\\_agricultural\\_wildlife\\_damage\\_woodchucks.html](http://www.hsus.org/wildlife/issues_facing_wildlife/humanely_reducing_agricultural_damage_by_wildlife/humanely_reducing_agricultural_wildlife_damage_woodchucks.html)

- Visit All Species Kinship (A.S.K.) for injured/orphaned/nuisance help: [www.allspecieskinship.org](http://www.allspecieskinship.org)

Portions adapted from: Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living With Wildlife By John Hadidian