



Brunswick Wildlife “Masked Fuzzy Warbler”

Warbler? Not really. “Masked Fuzzy Warbler” is just my pet name for raccoons. I was taking photos for another article on Brunswick’s birds but found napping raccoons instead. Sometimes other wildlife gets in the way of birding; however, you enjoy it just as much!

These photos were taken near Town Creek, of two Northern Raccoons in a cavity high up in a live tree. I say “two” because, unless this is one raccoon that is a contortionist, the huge hind foot probably belongs to its sibling or mother. The second photo was taken two weeks after the “big foot” photo.

I watched this cavity for the past two years and have seen what appeared to be gray fur or feathers. I was hoping for the gray down of baby Barred Owls. Then I saw a mother raccoon at the base of the tree and finally decided it was fur instead of feathers. On my next visit I found these sleeping beauties.

The range of the Northern Raccoon covers the entire United States and much of Canada...except for the arid portions of the Great Basin and Arizona. They are most abundant near streams and swamps.

Raccoons are nocturnal and generally not active during the day. Having excellent hearing and night vision, raccoons are very alert to the presence of prey, predators, and garbage cans.

They are omnivores (eat both plants and animals) and opportunistic. Like us omnivorous humans, they eat fruits, nuts, insects, frogs, crayfish, crabs, bird eggs, and almost anything else they can catch or uncover. They sleep a lot during harsh winter weather, living on stored body fat, but they do not hibernate.

Raccoons have adapted very well to living with humans so a nighttime raid on your garbage can may yield many tasty treats! Raccoon populations have continued to grow and their range has expanded in the past century; based on their adaptability to living with changes to their environment brought about by humans.

Raccoons mate in the winter and give birth in early spring. After mating there is no association of males and females...and only the female cares for the young.

A litter with generally three or four young, born with a full fur coat but helpless with closed eyes, is raised in a tree den like the one pictured. The young are weaned by the time they are approximately seventy days old and afterwards they forage with their mother at night and continue to stay in the den with her. The young may leave in fall or remain with their mother in the den for a portion or all of their first winter.

Raccoons have a well developed sense of touch. "Raccoon" is derived from an Algonquin Indian word meaning "he scratches with his hands." Their forepaws are especially sensitive, enabling a raccoon to handle and pry open prey, and they normally use their forepaws to pick up food items before eating.

Contrary to popular legend (and what we were taught in high school), scientists believe that raccoons do not actually wash their food even though they frequently dunk food in water before eating it. This habit, much more likely to be seen in captive raccoons, is probably the animal's way of imitating taking prey from creeks and rivers.

If you have bird feeders you may find these guys at night, eating seed off the ground. Enjoy watching...just do not try to feed by hand because raccoons may carry rabies, sylvatic plague, and other diseases and parasites. Never approach a raccoon...or any other wild animal...that seems tame or is acting strangely.

John Ennis