

Predators of Domestic Fowl in Minnesota

By
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The main predators of domestic fowl in Minnesota are:

Raccoons
Fox
Coyote
Mink
Hawks
Owls
Opossums
Dogs
Skunks
Cats
Rats



Note...

Minnesota wildlife see your flock as a tempting meal. Learning about these animals and their habits can aid in preventing predation. However, like humans, animals are individuals and don't always abide by a set of predictable behaviors. The nocturnal Raccoon will become diurnal if she needs to feed her babies an extra meal!

Predation prevention housing & equipment

- **Secure & sturdy coop**

- Four walls built on a cement pad, secure roof, solid door with lockable latch.
- Metal flashing on lower 1.5 feet of interior walls

- **Fenced in barnyard or pen**

- 5 foot tall woven wire fencing completely enclosing barnyard or pen.
- Fencing should be buried underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- Fencing material can loosely overhang outward of top of fence by 1.5 feet.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen, installed 8 inches from fence and 8 inches off the ground.

- **Commercial wire dog kennel for small flocks of 5 or less.**

- Smaller meshed fencing material attached to lower two feet of kennel and buried underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- 1" mesh golf netting firmly attached and covering entire top of kennel.

- **Motion activated perimeter lighting.**

- **Portable radio set on a talk show station.**

- **Baby monitor with good range.**

Raccoons

Raccoons are nocturnal omnivores that hunt in fields bordering forests, forests, suburbs and cities. They are always within two miles of bodies of water or rivers.



Photo by Leslie, blogger for Palazzo Rospo

Raccoons reached under the fencing of this pen and killed a hen. Smaller gage wire fencing buried 1' or an electric wire would have prevented this kill.

Raccoons

Signs of predation:

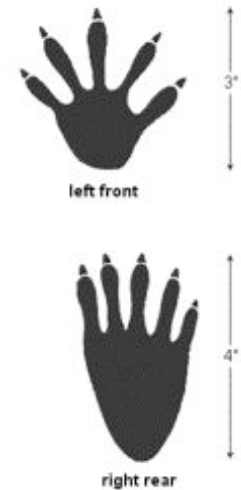
- Several birds killed.
- Carcasses show that the birds' crops and heads were eaten.
- Eggs eaten.
- Live birds missing limbs.

Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- Pen fencing extending underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- Fencing material loosely overhanging top of fence by 1.5 feet.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen.
- Secure kennel covered in 1" golf mesh.
- Portable radio set on a talk show station overnight.

Prevention Tactics:

- Lock chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts raccoons away from the coop.



Raccoons

Warning:

Avoid all contact with Raccoons and their feces!

Raccoons carry a parasite deadly to humans and other animals. Baylisascaris Procyonis eggs are microscopic and are usually found in Raccoon feces but can be spread on to their fur and feet.

Fox

Fox are nocturnal carnivores that hunt in prairies, fields, forests, suburbs and city parks.



Signs of Predation:

- Only one or two birds killed.
- Carcasses are gone only feathers remain.



Fox

Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- 5' high pen with fencing extending underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen.
- Secure commercial dog kennel.
- Overnight radio tuned to talk show channel.



Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Allow pet dogs to freely roam (and urinate) around coop and pen at night.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts rodents (Fox prey) away from the coop.

Coyote

Coyotes are nocturnal carnivores (sometimes omnivores) that hunt and scavenge in prairies, fields, fields bordering forests, suburbs and cities.

Signs of predation:

- Only one or two birds killed.
- Carcasses are gone only feathers remain.



Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- 5' high pen with fencing extending underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen.
- Secure Commercial dog kennel.
- Motion activated lights.
- Overnight radio tuned to talk show channel.

Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Allow pet dogs to freely roam (and urinate) around coop and pen at night.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts rodents (Coyote prey) away from the coop.



Mink

Mink are cat sized, mainly nocturnal, semi aquatic carnivores with a musky odor and little fear of humans. They hunt in forests, wetlands and suburbs with lakes and mature trees.

Signs of predation

- Several or all birds killed at one time.
- Carcasses may be neatly piled.
- Only one or two carcasses will have missing heads or neck flesh.
- Carcasses have small bite marks.



Mink

Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop built on a cement pad with lockable door or hatch.
- Coop's lower interior walls should be covered in metal flashing.
- 5' high fenced in pen with small gage fencing (1") extending underground 1' or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet.
- Dog kennel fencing should have a smaller gage (1") fencing material affixed to the bottom 3 feet, all around.

Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard, so that leftover feed attracts rodents (mink prey) away from the coop.

Temporary solution:

- Set up a live trap baited with sardines or hamster/pet rodent bedding (mink love rodents)
- Check trap frequently because a mink can quickly learn how to get out of it.
- Relocate the mink more than 10 miles away, in a wooded area near a body of water.
- Relocating a mink in winter will cause it certain death.

Hawks

Hawks are diurnal carnivores that hunt in open fields, prairies, cities, new suburb developments and forest edges.



This hawk has killed an adult polish hen and proceeds to eat it within the confines of the barnyard.

Hawks

Signs of predation:

- Only one chicken killed.
- Deep gauges and claw marks on head and neck of carcass.
- Feathers plucked from torso of carcass.
- Some flesh and viscera eaten.
- Frequently the carcass is taken away.



Prevention housing & equipment:

- For dog kennel pens or small fenced yards smaller than 25 feet wide, cover entire area with 1" golf netting firmly affixed to fencing. Tall posts can be installed to lift the netting in the middle of the yard.

All hawks are federally protected, they cannot be killed, trapped or relocated.

Owls

Owls are nocturnal carnivores. Depending on the species of owl, they will hunt in prairies, fields, forests and suburbs.



Signs of predation:

- Only one bird killed.
- Deep gauges and claw marks on back and torso of carcass.
- Head removed from carcass.
- Carcass may be taken and consumed high in a tree.



Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.

All owls are federally protected, they cannot be killed, trapped or relocated.

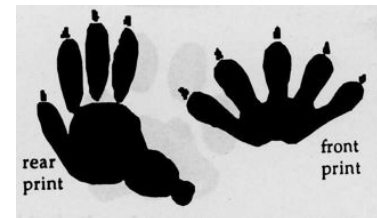
Opossums

Opossums in Minnesota are short lived, nocturnal omnivores that scavenge in fields bordering forests, forests, and suburbs with mature trees.



Signs of predation:

- Only one small, weak or sick bird is killed.
- Carcass is mauled, abdomen is eaten.
- Eggs eaten.



Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- Overnight radio tuned to talk show channel.

Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts opossums away from the coop.
- Keep domestic geese, these will chase opossums away.



Opossum in a nest box.

Skunk

Skunk are nocturnal and crepuscular omnivores that scavenge in fields, forests and suburbs with mature trees.

Signs of predation:

- Odor
- Only chicks or small bantams are killed.
- Carcasses have their abdomens eaten.
- Eggs eaten.

Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- Overnight radio tuned to talk show channel.

Prevention Tactics:

- Close chickens up in their coop before dusk, let them out after dawn.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts skunks and rodents (skunk prey) away from the coop.
- Keep domestic geese, these will chase skunks away.



Spotted skunk in a barn.



Skunk eating eggs in a chicken coop.

Skunk

Warning:

Skunks are the main carriers of Rabies in Minnesota.

Skunks usually die within two weeks of contracting rabies however during this time they are disoriented, lose their fear of humans and roam around in daylight.

The spotted skunk is protected in Minnesota from killing, trapping or relocating, and is classified as a species of "special concern".

Dogs

Unsupervised, free roaming, ill-trained dogs will sometimes attack chickens in “thrill kills”.

Signs of predation:

- Several or all birds killed.
- Carcasses are mauled but not eaten.
- Some carcasses are missing.



Hens killed by dogs.



Upset flock owner.



Dog playfully attacks a rooster.



Dalmatian brings home his kill.

Dogs

Prevention Equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- 5 ' high pen with fencing extending underground 1 foot or folded outward on the ground for 1.5 feet or secure commercial dog kennel.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen.

Prevention Tactics:

Tell the owners or keepers of marauding dogs that in Minnesota...

- If a dog kills or pursues domestic livestock, its owner can be charged with a petty misdemeanor.
- A livestock owner is free to kill a dog that is killing, wounding, chasing, worrying, harassing, or attacking livestock.
- A dog's owner or keeper is financially liable for any livestock damage the dog causes.



Most dog /chicken relationships are good.

Cats

Cats are nocturnal, diurnal and crepuscular hunters that can be found wherever humans are found.

Signs of Predation:

- Only chicks or small bantams killed.
- Heads eaten.
- Carcasses are frequently brought home.

Prevention housing & equipment:

- Secure coop with lockable door or hatch.
- 5 ' high fenced pen or commercial dog kennel.
- Electric wire around the outer perimeter of coop and pen.

Prevention Tactics:

- Keeps cats indoors for their own safety and that of song birds, native rodents. etc.
- Check local city ordinances, many have “leash laws” for cats, like Plymouth, Brooklyn Park, Mound, St. Louis Park, New Hope, Greenfield, Inver Grove Heights, Rogers, etc.
- Cats do not reduce outdoor rat/mouse populations. All the contrary. Cats find native rodents (voles, chipmunks, etc) easier pray and will kill these first, opening up habitat and resources for the faster reproducing rats and mice.
- Live trap feral cats and bring to your local AHS. Feral cats have short, difficult lives in Minnesota due to our extreme winters.



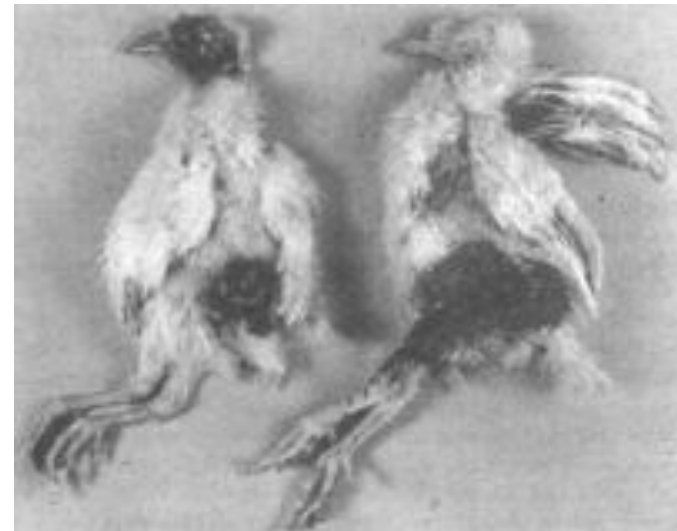
Look at what kitty brought home!

Rats

Rats are mainly nocturnal omnivores and aggressive opportunistic carnivores that can be found anywhere humans are found.

Signs of predation

- Only one or two birds killed.
- Victims are chicks, weak, lame or sick.
- Carcass skeleton is intact (no broken bones or missing limbs)
- Carcass head remains but, eyes, feathers, hocks and vent area are gnawed on.



Rats

Prevention Equipment:

- Coop built with solid wood on a cement pad, with a secure roof, solid door with lockable latch.
- Metal flashing on lower 1.5 feet of interior walls of coop.

Prevention Tactics:

- Keep coop clean, rats are attracted to and will eat chicken droppings.
- Maintain a healthy population of native rodents (chipmunks, voles, gophers, etc) on your property to occupy any dens or tunnels that rats would otherwise use.
- Feed chickens in their outdoor pen or barnyard so that leftover feed attracts rats outdoors where the rats can become prey to owls and mink.
- Cats do not reduce rat populations. All the contrary. Cats find native rodents (voles, chipmunks, etc) easier pray and will kill these first, opening up habitat and resources for the faster reproducing rats.



Particle board coop wall chewed by rats.



Rats can chew and tunnel through old crumbling cement.

Happy Safe Chickens

