

Raccoon Is Amusing, Likeable 'Bandit'



Along The Trail by ken legg

Easily recognized despite the "disguise" of his well-known mask—or, perhaps, because of it—the raccoon is a well-liked animal throughout the nation. In addition to being an amusing pet, the 'coon also is the quarry of hunters in many parts of the country.

The Indians called him "little brother to the bear"; I call him, "the bandit," not for his activities, but because he wears a perpetual mask.

One of the best loved of all mammals, the raccoon is encouraged to visit many a dooryard by humans who delight in seeing them, and observing their behavior.

The ring-tailed raccoon has lost more tails to Davey Crockett hats and radiator caps than any other animal, since some people, mainly, children, or at least childish people, find more pleasure in seeing an animal tail dangling from places other than where they were intended to hang.

The raccoon is one of our most interesting and intelligent animals. Curiosity is one of its traits, one which has often been its undoing. Bright objects have a fascination for our masked friend. Trappers have capitalized on the 'coon's curiosity by placing metal strips, or tinfoil, on steel trap pans. The animals slap at these with their paws and get caught.

It is commonly believed that a coon always washes its food. "Always" is not a good word to use when speaking of the habits of wild creatures, for there are usually exceptions. It is true that coons usually wash their food if water is available. They will—however, as many people who feed them will verify, eat without washing.

Food of the raccoon is almost as varied as that of the bear and includes almost anything edible. They may have a preference for animal, as opposed to vegetable matter, and prefer live animals to carrion. This they often reject with obvious disgust.

I have had green corn in my vegetable garden ruined by coons which simply tear the stalks to pieces getting at the succulent ears. They are fond of sweet stuff and rob bee hives when they can be dug out.

Raccoons move about mostly, although not wholly, by night. In cold climates they often go into a semi-hibernation and ap-

pear on warm nights to go foraging for food. It is on these warm nights that hunters, with dogs, go out looking for the 'coon. In many sections of the country, 'coon hunting is a favorite sport.

The dogs pursue their quarry until he takes to a tree. Once he is treed the hounds gather around the base and sing out to the hunter. The men come up armed with guns and lights and try to "shine" the 'coon, an expression meaning to locate his eyes by the light reflecting from them. When located, a member of the party usually shoots the 'coon, although some avid hunters thrill only to the chase and allow the 'coon to live.

In many sections of the country destruction of hollow, den trees, suitable for 'coon homes, has nearly caused the 'coon to become extinct.

Raccoons are good to eat. Their fur seems to go up and down in price over the years. During the days when coonskin coats were the rage in college, 'coon hides were much in demand. The Davey Crockett craze has brought on a shortage of hides, and many of the "coon tails" are only imitation since the genuine ones are no longer obtainable in some instances.

Because of the 'coon's fascinating actions, his clean habits and his honest, although masked, face, many people find pleasure in feeding them and like to have them around the house as guests. The young are comical in their actions and very cute.

Male 'coons may weigh up to 20 pounds and in a fight are quite ferocious. It is said that in water a 'coon is more than a match for several dogs, and there are few dogs that care to take on a boar 'coon single-handed.

Because of their nocturnal habits, visitors to state parks are aware of raccoons' presence only by seeing their baby-like "hand-prints" in the mud or dust, or by hearing when they throw the garbage can lids off at night.

Raccoons occur in most of California including the desert regions. They seem, however, to