



THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Encouraging Natural Rodent Control

Did you know that one barn owl can eat 1,000 rodents in a year? Or 155 gophers a year?

Many local birds of prey (including owls, hawks, kestrels, and eagles) love to eat mice, rats, and gophers. Thus they're our natural allies in managing these pests without toxics

Yes, these soaring beauties that lift our eyes overhead — and offer magical soft hoots in the night — are also part of nature's systems at work. And they offer us their services for free!

For instance, one study found that, after raptor nesting boxes were placed in farm areas, applications for highly-toxic rodenticides dropped 50 to 90%. (<https://bit.ly/2Gvn5Z9>)

What You Can Do

So, how can you support raptors in their essential role?

1) Don't use rat poisons, at home or work. Also don't allow your pest control service to use them. When rats are poisoned, so are the raptors who eat them. This harms them

— and your rodent control goals, by taking those natural predators out of the rodent control game. Also, even small amounts of



rat poison can be highly toxic to curious children, pets, and wildlife. (See over.) We shared the story of a reader whose cat was poisoned in *TNS IX/6* (www.healthyworld.org/GRAPHICS/STEP/stepvol9no6.pdf). And poisoned rats can die behind walls, causing an unreachable smell.

2) Avoid using other pesticides outside. Many studies have shown that common insecticides and herbicides can kill and weaken birds and other wildlife — and travel far beyond their original property lines. (See <https://bit.ly/2TRXb4J>.) Plus the relatively new neonicotinoid pesticides are toxic to birds at shockingly low levels. According to The American Bird Conservancy, "A single corn kernel coated with a neonicotinoid can kill a songbird." (<https://bit.ly/2S842p1>) The STEP Index can help you find less-toxic alternatives to your current products.

3) Consider encouraging owls on your land. This can be an easy and low-cost way to help reduce a pest population. See the top right sidebar for more. (Note: You might not want to do this if you have outdoor pets or chickens. Or at least keep them protected or inside after twilight.)

4) Use other smarter rodent controls. (See bottom right sidebar.)

BONUS TIP: Are owls already visiting your land? We often don't know, because of their quiet nocturnal ways and skillful camouflage. But their calls can give them away. Compare the sounds you hear to the ones listed here: <https://bit.ly/2BGiPSr>. (I'm delighted to discover that I'm being visited by a Great Horned Owl!)

How to Welcome Owl Visitors

■ **Respect personal space.** Do not disturb owls or their nests.

■ **Protect darkness.** Turn off outdoor lights overnight, or put them on timers or motion sensors. Owls need darkness for their night hunting.

■ **Retain perches.** Leave some large horizontal branches on trees. Owls like to perch and roost in large mature shaded and secluded trees.

■ **Offer shelter.** Keep trees with cavities and old nests for owls to nest in. Or explore building or buying nesting boxes. Learn what boxes work best for your desired owls, and how to set yours' up effectively.

■ **Provide a summer bath.** Owls don't generally need birdbaths. But in summer heat they can enjoy a deeper birdbath for drinking or washing, ideally in a more secluded spot.

■ **Take down soccer and other nets at night.** Owls can fly into them and get tangled or caught.

Learn fun facts about owls at www.idahoptv.org/sciencetrek/topics/owls/facts.cfm. For information on local birds, see <https://bit.ly/2DQ84gV>.

Other Rodent Control Steps

Rats and mice can cause damage to and inside buildings. Here are some key less-toxic ways to protect your home:

■ **Find and block rodent entry points.** An expert can help; look for one committed to non-toxic ways.

■ **Store food in secure containers** (especially grains).

■ **Trap rodents that get inside.** With mice, you can use live traps to catch and release. But don't do this with rats, as it's unsafe and against state law. With both mice and rats, you can also use electronic or snap traps. The latter can go inside an enclosure box. Don't use glue traps, as these can trap other creatures.

For more tips, see: The STEP Index under **Rodents** • www.saferodentcontrol.org/site/rodent-control • www.msosquito.com/programs-services/rodent-program

