

# Harbor Island, Naturally

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A PERSONAL PROJECT OF JOHN ALBERT



## RACCOONS NIGHTTIME RAIDERS

### CUTE, SMART AND DANGEROUS

This grayish brown mammal is seen all over the sea islands, especially near your garbage cans after dark. The scientific name for raccoons, *Procyon lotor*, translates to one who washes describing their habit of using the front feet to hunt for food in water. Nocturnal hunters raccoons will eat almost anything including crayfish, frogs, and most other aquatic creatures. On land their lightning



PHOTOS BY JOHN ALBERT

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fast front paws catch mice and insects and raid nests for eggs and chicks.

They especially like the fruit and plants we tend to grow in our farms and gardens. The ones that frequent my yard love the tomatoes (yellow ones) and peppers my wife, Sarah grows in earth boxes. My first real quarrel with my nightly visitors was over the remains of an Alvin Ord corned beef sandwich that found its way into the garbage can under the house. The can was secured, I thought, by several bungee cords. Randy Raccoon managed to get into the can. Certainly I could not think this critter. It took more bungee cords, drilling holes in concrete blocks and stainless steel eye hooks, but our garbage is now secure, at least for now. On a serious note raccoons are the carriers of several life threatening diseases.

**Rabies:** Rabies is a virus that is spread by contact with the saliva of a rabid animal or by being scratched or bitten by a rabid animal. Raccoons are one of the most common species to carry rabies. Two cases of rabies, connected to raccoons have recently been reported on Hilton Head.

*Baylisascaris procyonis*: (Bay-lis-asc-aris) The Raccoon Ascarid or roundworm is a parasite of the intestines of raccoons that sheds large numbers of eggs in the feces. Feces contaminated with eggs can become infective to humans after 2-4 weeks of incubation. Exposure to feces during handling, feeding and cleaning can cause a serious disease known as Visceral Larval Migrants and infection of the central nervous system. Oral ingestion of infective stages of eggs is the primary route of exposure. For more information on these and other diseases connected to raccoons go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

or

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/pdf/raccoons.pdf> .

Avoidance and removing artificial sources of food can go a long way toward making our islands safe for us and the raccoons

Sources

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Kenn Kaufman