

Who is That Guy in the Black Mask?

Many animals try to teach their babies how to survive in the wilds. Bears **cuff** their cubs to keep them away from danger. Reindeer often run in a huge circle when there is danger. The baby fawns are taught to stay close beside their mothers. All of these animals learn from the parents. The greatest teacher of all, however, may be the raccoon. The cubs learn an enormous amount of information about the sights and sounds of the world from their mothers.

Many different enemies threaten raccoons. Hunters often take hound dogs and search for coons. Owls and hawks **stalk** them from the air. Coyotes, foxes, and bobcats chase them on the ground. A raccoon cannot be too careful! Baby raccoons are very curious. This can get them in trouble. They also live in towns. This can add additional dangers. They may be hit by cars or chased by family dogs.

Raccoons have learned some amazing ways to avoid hounds. The mother teaches them to walk on top of walls and wade through streams to break the **scent**. They even learn to walk on fallen trees. The babies repeat what their mother does over and over. If they are being chased far from home, the mother may send them up a tree.

Each evening the mother leads her cubs out to hunt for food. She teaches them to find mice. She helps them locate turtle eggs. She shows them how to search for frogs and crayfish in ponds. She teaches them how to steal

Words you'll need to know...

cuff a quick slap

scent odor

stalk search for

eggs from birds' nests. They even learn to catch fish. Raccoons can do all of these things because they have feet with fingers similar to human hands. They can actually crawl straight up a brick wall!

Raccoons will eat almost anything. This is fortunate. They need to gain weight for the winter months. They fill themselves up on everything from wild fruit to insects. Eating in the fall is very important. They often get so fat that they can hardly move. During cold weather, they frequently sleep for several days at a time.

A raccoon makes a dangerous pet. They are really cute, but they may carry an extremely bad disease—rabies. Doctors have warned people to avoid them.



Questions and Discussion

1. If the cubs are not taught, what can we assume?

- a. They will learn things on their own.
- b. They will stay in the den.
- c. They will probably not live long.
- d. They will be happier.

2. If raccoons do not eat a lot in the fall, what can we assume?

- a. They will move to a new place with food.
- b. They may not survive the winter.
- c. They will not get food from their mother.
- d. They will be happier.

3. Why do you think their mother teaches raccoons so many skills?
