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Controlling the Wild Things

By Sophie Braccini



Adrian the cat surveys a skunk in the backyard.

Photo Cherie Grant

The cover story of the late May edition of The Economist is about the 'Anthropocene,' a new geologic chronological term for our time characterized by the reshaping of the planet by humans. Wilderness is becoming increasingly irrelevant, because the world's ecosystems are increasingly dominated by creatures that fare well in an environment dominated by humans while their wilder, natural predators are disappearing. In the suburban environment, where readily accessible food abounds, we see the proliferation of what some call pests – such as skunks, raccoons or turkeys – while mountain lions and other predators that could control these populations are pushed further away. Humans do not always react positively to this cohabitation with semi-rural wildlife.

Moraga's peaceful neighborhood that adjoins open space. In a recent letter to her neighbors, the former Moraga mayor explains the steps she took to address the increasing skunk problem on her property. She contacted Contra Costa Vector Control and Inspector Joe Cleope came to her house to survey the problem.

"He (Cleope) has apparently removed about six skunks from our area, and has had several other calls," she said, "Unless we all cooperate, the problem will become increasingly worse." Cleope could not find a skunk den at Grant's house and will have to trap somewhere else. "The problem is that some residents are leaving cat food outside their homes," adds Grant, "and it encourages all sort of animals to get closer to homes."

She hopes that more neighbors will call on Vector Control, which is

a free service. As far as skunks are concerned, Vector Control can intervene if the animals are considered a potential rabies vector, but not for odiferous issues. The free public service was established at the beginning of the 20th century to prevent the spreading of diseases such as malaria. Today Vector Control continues its efforts to protect the public from emerging diseases. They are well known for mosquito control programs, and removal of ground-nesting yellow jackets. They also assist cities that have problems with mice and rats. But Vector Control does not offer a solution for raccoons or turkeys.

In Moraga, turkeys continue to fly around and nest in the hills.

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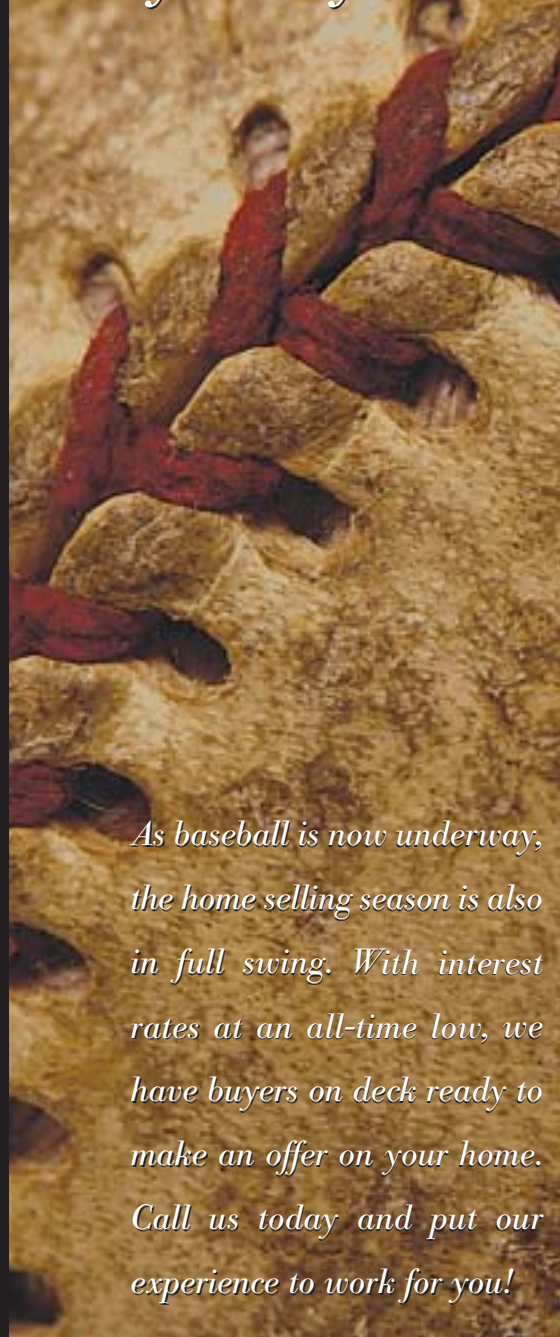
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