

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Q. Dear Twig: What's a raccoon latrine?

A. It's a place where a raccoon goes to the bathroom over and over and over again. Or a place where a *lot* of raccoons do it. It could be on a

tree stump. Or up in the crotch of a tree. Or up on the roof of your house. Or even under your playset.

It's something you'll want to stay away from. And not just because it's a **public toilet for wild animals that never gets cleaned up or emptied.**

See, a raccoon's little presents can give a person a terrible illness, a parasite called **raccoon roundworm**. Millions of the creature's eggs can be inside those presents; the eggs are what spread it, or can. So you don't want to touch those presents by accident. Not that you'd want to anyway. The good news: Infections are rare.

"Simply being aware of the roundworm and **avoiding raccoon latrines** is probably the most important approach to avoiding infections." So says an Ohio State University Extension fact sheet.

In fact I'm still stunned that raccoons use latrines.

It all seems so ... *organized*.

Hey, get in line,

Twig

From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).



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Notes: The fact sheet is called "Raccoon Roundworm: Facts and Prevention." Wildlife specialist Stan Gehrt of Ohio State and Kristen Page of Wheaton College (Illinois) wrote it. The first photo in it? A raccoon caught in the middle of using a latrine. "Taken!" it seems to be saying. Or, maybe not. Adult roundworms live in a raccoon's small intestines. They usually don't make the raccoon sick. But the larvae can sicken and even kill not just people (again, fortunately, infections are rare) but dogs, mice, birds, rabbits, rodents and others. Also try "Raccoon Roundworm" at http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12150_12220-27261--,00.html. The first photo in it is gross. (Sooo ... Yes! Check it out!)

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