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***Nature* explores a *Raccoon Nation*
Wednesday, February 8, 2012 on PBS**

Exclusive content and streaming episodes available at pbs.org/nature

When the lights go down in cities across North America, another world is revealed, populated by shady little characters that live alongside us, but exist in the margins. These pint-size problem solvers are smart, adaptable and omnivorous, and they love a good challenge. Welcome to the world of urban raccoons. With their busy little hands, they can do what other would-be urban animals can't – open doors, get into attics, and raid secured trash cans. And they are especially fond of big cities, like Chicago, New York, and Toronto – the raccoon capital of the world. In cities everywhere, wherever they've been introduced, they have done very, very well. Using both night-vision cameras and raccoon-proof radio collars, scientists set out to learn about their hidden, intimate world. ***Nature's Raccoon Nation*** premieres Wednesday, February 8, 2012 at 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). After broadcast, the episode will stream online at pbs.org/nature.

Celebrating its 30th season, ***Nature*** is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET, the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21, New York's public television stations and operator of NJTV. For nearly 50 years, WNET has been producing and broadcasting national and local documentaries and other programs for the New York community.

Originally from the tropics, where they could be found foraging along riverbanks, over time raccoons moved north, adapting to new environments, predators, and foods. In the process, they developed a real taste for big city life. As a result, raccoon populations have grown twenty-fold in North American cities over the last seventy years, and there are now fifty times more raccoons living in Toronto than in the same area in the surrounding countryside.

Following a family of urban raccoons over the course of six months as the young leave their den high in a tree and head down dark alleyway and haunts with their mother, high-definition cameras

and intensive GPS tracking reveal new insights about a species that is far more elusive and wily than most people ever imagined, and more destructive.

A study on interspecies communication has demonstrated real risks associated with urban raccoons. Increased contact between animals rarely in such close contact can escalate exposure to contagious diseases and cause them to become more robust and infectious. Chicago is fighting outbreaks of parasites carried and transmitted by the raccoons that have overrun their city.

North America is not the only place raccoons have populated and made their own. In Japan, where raccoons are not indigenous, a popular 1970's cartoon made baby raccoons all the rage and thousands were shipped into the country. Then these tiny pets grew up, became far less appealing and were released into the wild, where they immediately found new accommodations that suited them well. Their new landlords, however, are less than happy. These tenacious tenants have caused damage to 80% of the ancient shrines and temples in the country and have proven nearly impossible to evict.

The city of Kassel, in central Germany, is home to the largest population of raccoons in Europe, nearly 300 per square mile, all descendants of a pair of raccoons imported in the 1930's and some two dozen raccoons that escaped from a local fur farm. Using the drainpipes they found on every home in the area to climb up and in, raccoons have made *su casa es mi casa* their way of life. Scientists and engineers are left to take on their ever growing numbers, house by house.

It seems that the more obstacles you throw in their way, the smarter they get. In an effort to outwit raccoons, we may be pushing their brain development and perhaps even sending them down a new evolutionary path. One biologist who has been studying raccoons for 25 years believes the city life is in fact cultivating "über-raccoons," ready to take over the world. But it looks as though they will continue to do so one small area at a time. At the end of a two-month radio-collar study, it's discovered that city raccoons average a surprisingly small home range of only about three square blocks. Still, it's all they need to live in comfort. And only time will tell just how advanced this "nation" of urban raccoons will become.

Nature is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET for PBS. Fred Kaufman is executive producer. **Raccoon Nation** was produced by Raccoons Inc. in association with The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and THIRTEEN for WNET.

Nature pioneered a television genre that is now widely emulated in the broadcast industry. Throughout its history, **Nature** has brought the natural world to millions of viewers. The series has been consistently among the most-watched primetime series on public television.

Nature has won more than 600 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities, and environmental organizations including 10 Emmys, three Peabodys and the first award given to a television program by the Sierra Club. The series received two of wildlife film industry's highest honors: the Christopher Parsons Outstanding Achievement Award given by the Wildscreen Festival and the Grand Teton Award given by the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. Recently, Fred Kaufman was named the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Media by the 2012 International Wildlife Film Festival.

PBS.org/nature is the award-winning web companion to **Nature** featuring streaming episodes, filmmaker interviews, teacher's guides, and more.

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About WNET

New York's WNET is America's flagship public media outlet, bringing quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. The parent company of public television stations [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#), [Tavis Smiley](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Noah Compende](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [SundayArts](#), [Reel 13](#), *NJ Today* and the new online newsmagazine [MetroFocus](#).