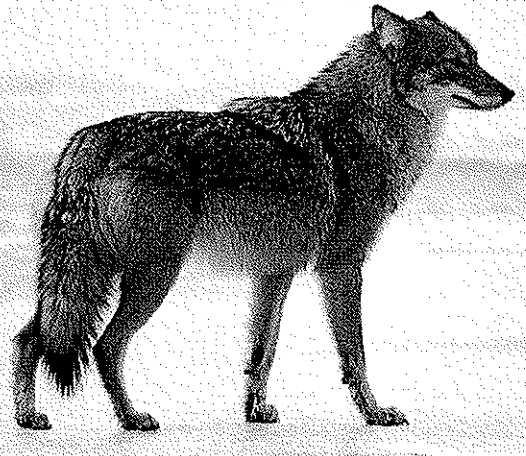




Living With Wildlife

Eastern Coyotes in Massachusetts

Photo © by Bill Byrne



The eastern coyote, *Canis latrans*, is well established throughout most of Massachusetts except on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. A medium sized predator, it is an opportunistic feeder and extraordinarily adaptable to a wide range of habitats. Coyotes thrive in suburban/urban as well as rural areas, and will utilize whatever food is naturally available, including small animals, birds, insects and fruits, as well as artificial sources such as garbage, pet food, birdseed and compost. Take precautions to eliminate any food sources in your yard and neighborhood to avoid creating problems with coyotes.

Never deliberately provide food for coyotes!

Description: The eastern coyote resembles a medium-sized dog in body size and shape, but has longer, denser fur and pointed, erect ears. The tail is long, black-tipped, and bushy. Typical coat color is a grizzled gray but can vary from creamy blonde to red or nearly solid black. Typical weights for females are 33-40 pounds, while males typically range between 34-47 pounds. A very large male may weigh in the neighborhood of 60 pounds, but such an animal is exceptional. Coyotes often look heavier than they are because of their thick fur.

Life history: An adult male and female will actively maintain a territory that may vary in size from 2 to 30 square miles. Breeding season peaks in mid February, followed by 4 - 8 pups born in a den in April or May. Coyotes maintain seasonal social units that consist of the adult pair and the pups until the pups disperse on their own in late autumn.

Habits: Coyotes are typically shy and elusive, but they can frequently be seen individually, in pairs, or in small groups where food is commonly found. They communicate by vocalizing, scent marking and through a variety of body displays. It is common to hear them howling and yipping at night, or even during the day in response to sirens and other loud noises. Coyotes remain active year-round and do not hibernate.

Food: Coyotes are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will feed on whatever is most readily available and easiest to obtain. Their omnivorous diet consists of a variety of foods including rodents, rabbits, deer, birds, insects, reptiles, fruits, and berries. They will scavenge road kills, rodents and birds killed by cats, as well as garbage and pet food left outdoors. In suburbia, they have been known to prey on unprotected pets, including house cats and small dogs. Pet owners are advised to keep cats indoors, and dogs under control during the day and in secured kennels or indoors at night.

Help Keep Coyotes Wild

Coyotes thrive in suburban and urban areas. To avoid problems with coyotes and to make your property less attractive to them, you should follow some basic practices:



Secure Your Garbage

Coyotes raid open trash materials and compost piles. Secure your garbage in tough plastic containers with tight fitting lids and keep them in secure buildings when possible. Take out trash when the morning pick up is scheduled, not the previous night. Keep compost in secure, vented containers, and keep barbecue grilles clean to reduce attractive odors.

Don't Feed or Try to Pet Coyotes

Keep wild things wild! Feeding, whether direct or indirect, can cause coyotes to act tame and may lead to bold behavior. Coyotes that rely on natural foods remain wild and wary of humans.

Keep your Pets Safe

Although free roaming pets are more likely to be killed by automobiles than by wild animals, coyotes do view cats and small dogs as potential food, and larger dogs as competition. For the safety of your pets, keep them restrained at all times.

Keep Bird Feeder Areas Clean

Use feeders designed to keep seed off the ground, as the seed attracts many small mammals coyotes prey upon. Remove feeders if coyotes are regularly seen around your yard.

Feed Pets Indoors

Outdoor feeding attracts many wild animals to your door!_

Close Off Crawl Spaces under Porches and Sheds

Coyotes use such areas for resting and raising young._

Don't Let Coyotes Intimidate You

Don't hesitate to scare or threaten coyotes with loud noises, bright lights, or water sprayed from a hose._

Cut Back Brushy Edges in your Yard

These areas provide cover for coyotes and their prey._

Protect Livestock and Produce

Coyotes will prey on livestock. Various techniques, such as fencing, will protect livestock from predation. Clear fallen fruit from around fruit trees._

Educate your Neighbors

Pass this information along: Your efforts will be futile if neighbors are providing food or shelter for coyotes.

Eastern coyotes are an important and valuable natural resource in Massachusetts. They are classified as a furbearer species, for which a regulated hunting season and management program have been established. If you are experiencing problems with coyotes, or have any questions regarding them, contact your nearest MassWildlife District Office. Further information on coyotes and other native furbearers is also available on our website: www.mass.gov/masswildlife.

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For more information contact **MassWildlife** at:

Western Wildlife District, Dalton: (413) 684-1646

Connecticut Valley Wildlife Dist., Belchertown: (413) 323-7632

Central Wildlife District, West Boylston: (508) 835-3607

Northeast Wildlife District, Ayer: (978) 772-2145

Southeast Wildlife District, Bourne: (508) 759-3406

Field Headquarters, Westborough: (508) 389-6300

or visit our website at www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/facilities/districts

MassWildlife "Balancing the needs of wildlife with the needs of people."



MassWildlife

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Wayne F. MacCallum, *Director*

Understanding Coyotes

Advice for Parents, School Officials, and Child Care Providers

Here in Massachusetts, there are many kinds of wildlife that thrive by living near people, including coyotes, red and gray fox, skunks, raccoons, wild turkey, and deer. In fact, almost all of our citizens live in close proximity to coyotes and other smaller predators. This information focuses on coyotes, but also applies to foxes, another commonly seen wild canid (dog). Coyotes live in urban, suburban, and rural areas and are naturally wary of people, but can definitely become comfortable in neighborhoods where they are not discouraged (by noise and other forms of hazing) or are actually encouraged (by ready sources of food, provided either directly or indirectly).

Preventing Conflicts

Leave Wildlife Wild. People should never approach, touch, or give food to any animal (including a pet that doesn't belong to them). Such contact is not safe for people, pets, or wildlife.

Why?

- Normally, wild animals have a natural fear of people. However, sick or fed (including indirectly) wildlife may be more likely to lose the fear of people.
- Some children may think that a coyote (or fox) is someone's dog, and many more people are bitten every year in the U.S. by aggressive dogs than by wild animals.
- Outdoor cats and wildlife can carry diseases that can be spread to people through direct contact.

Keep Food Sources Indoors or Locked in Outbuildings.

Why?

- Food (including snacks, pet food, birdseed, suet, and food-related trash) can attract coyotes, foxes, and other kinds of wildlife. Left outside, these foods encourage wild animals to visit residential areas or schoolyards more frequently. Prevent unwanted visitors by only feeding pets indoors, discontinuing bird-feeding, keeping dumpster areas clean, and using covered, secure trash barrels.
- Outdoor cats and wildlife can carry diseases that are spread when the animals feed in a concentrated area.

Spend Time in Your Backyard; Keep Playgrounds, Schoolyards, and Trails Mown and Open.

Why?

- Wild animals, including coyotes and foxes, generally try to avoid people. This natural fear of people is reinforced when play areas, backyards, and trails are kept open and actively used by people. These animals are less likely to spend time or be seen in areas that are used by people, especially when people make noise to deter wildlife.

When Children See a Coyote Nearby

Some parents express concern about their children's safety when they see or hear about coyotes in the neighborhood. In the vast majority of instances, there is no cause for alarm. Actual coyote attacks are extremely rare: Since the 1950s, when Eastern Coyotes were first found in Massachusetts, there have been **only four attacks on people by coyotes** in Massachusetts. Two of those animals were rabid, one was suspected to be rabid, and biologists suspect the fourth animal had been treated for a leg fracture by someone unfamiliar with proper wildlife rehabilitation practices. By contrast, and according to the Centers for Disease Control, about 4.5 million people are bitten by domestic dogs each year in the U.S.

When children are at a bus stop, in a backyard or neighborhood, or on a playground, there's a chance they might see a coyote or a fox.

Explain to children:

(1) Never go near or try to feed wild animals or any animal you don't know. Talk loudly, so the coyote or fox knows you are there. Don't run, but slowly back away, toward a building or house. Make yourself look bigger by putting your arms over your head or opening your jacket.

Why?

- The animal might not be aware that you are there. Talking loudly makes sure the animal is not surprised and frightened to find that a person is nearby.
- Instinctively, coyotes and foxes (and pet dogs) will follow after anything that runs, including a person, so you don't want to run from them.
- The bigger you look, the scarier you look to an animal.

(2) Find and Tell an Adult.

Why?

- Adults can harass and scare away these animals, to reinforce their natural fear of people. Adults can also quickly decide whether a wild animal or large dog is acting strangely or aggressively, and can call Public Safety for help.

Coyote Basics

Coyotes are now found in every city and town in Massachusetts, except on the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Coyotes are frequently seen individually, in pairs, or in small groups, wherever food is commonly found. A family group consists of an adult breeding pair, their pups, and, occasionally, the previous year's pups. Coyotes can be active night or day, and sightings at dawn or dusk are common.

For more advice and facts about coyotes, foxes, and other common neighborhood wildlife, go to: http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/wildlife/living/living_home.htm.

If you have exhausted these information sources but still have safety concerns or questions, contact the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife at (508) 389-6300, or email us at mass.wildlife@state.ma.us. If you decide that abnormal behavior – such as a coyote, fox, or other wild animal that is aggressive in the face of harassment or approaches a pet on a hand-held leash – requires an immediate response, you should contact local Public Safety officials (911), or the Massachusetts Environmental Police at (800) 632-8075.

**Please continue to enjoy the great outdoors and your wild neighbors...
from a safe distance!**