

Conservation Notes

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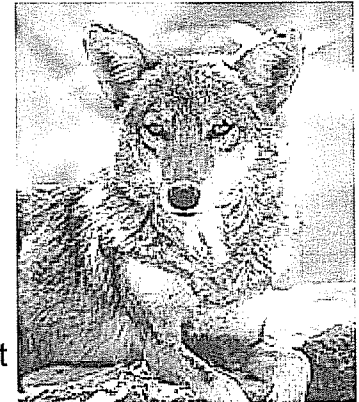
The Eastern Coyote in New Castle — Co-Existing Strategies

Natural History of Coyotes

The eastern coyote moved back into New York in the 1950's and has become firmly established and an integral part of our ecosystem. The coyote is a native to North America and have been a part of New Castle's landscape for decades. Coyotes are a medium sized predator, an opportunistic feeder and extremely adaptable to a wide range of habitats, quickly adjusting to changes in the landscape and are now found in all areas of the Town and region.

What do Coyotes look like?

Coyotes are the size of a medium-size dog (4-5 feet in length), but with longer, thicker fur. They often can have a German Shepard-like appearance. Coyotes have a long, bush, black-tipped tail that is usually carried pointing down. They have large erect ears, weigh between 35-50 pounds. The color of the fur can range from reddish-yellow, tan or gray or black. They have a patch of white fur around the lower jaw and neck. Because of their thick fur, they often appear heavier than they really are. They also can be confused with red and gray foxes who have similar coat colorations.



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 is in February with 4-8 pups born in a den in April/May. Coyotes are very social and will maintain family groups of pups until young adults disperse on their own in late fall.

Habits

Coyotes are typically shy and elusive, but can frequently be seen individually, in pairs or in small groups where food is commonly found. They communicate with each other by vocalizing, and scent marking of trails. They can be heard howling and yipping at night, or even during the day in response to sirens and other loud noises. Coyotes are active year-round and do not hibernate.

Food

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will feed on whatever is most readily available and easy to obtain. Their primary foods include small rodents, rabbits, birds, deer, insects, frogs and snakes, and fruit and berries. They will scavenge on road kills, garbage and pet food containers left outdoors. They are known to prey upon unprotected pets, including cats and small dogs.

Ecological Role and Benefits of Coyotes

Coyotes are an important part of a healthy ecosystem and in our area serve as one of the top predators in the food chain. They help maintain the health of our environment by controlling rodents, woodchucks, insects and other prolific animals and serve as one of nature's "clean-up services" by removing dead animals and preventing disease. Many other scavenger animals such as foxes, crows and hawks, benefit from coyote predation on other animals through increased food availability. People benefit by catching glimpses of this majestic animal or listening to their amazing vocal display.

Myths About Coyotes

TRUTH—Statistically, coyotes are not a significant threat to your safety. *Lightning, cows and deer pose a greater risk, but acting responsibly is always the key to safety.*

TRUTH—You may see a coyote in the daytime. *Coyotes can be very active during the daytime, don't assume they have rabies or are sick. Most common sightings are early morning and evenings.*

TRUTH—Coyotes are not a significant predator of pets and deer. *While coyotes may occasionally take free roaming domestic animals and deer, diet studies confirm that rodents, rabbits, insects, fruit and carrion make up the bulk of their diet.*

PREVENTING CONFLICTS WITH COYOTES—11 EASY TIPS

Here are a few suggestions to make your property less attractive to coyotes.

(1.) Don't let coyotes intimidate you! Don't hesitate to scare or threaten coyotes with loud noises and bright lights. Don't hesitate to pick up small objects, such as a tennis ball, and throw them at the coyote. If a water hose is close at hand, spray the coyote with water in the face. Let the coyote know it is unwelcome in your area. Carry a whistle, shout at them, coyotes do not like loud or sudden movements. Don't run, but slowly walk away (instinctively, coyotes (and pet dogs) will follow after anything that runs, including a person), make yourself look bigger by putting your arms over your head or opening your jacket.

(2.) Secure your garbage! Coyotes will raid open trash materials and compost piles. Secure your garbage in tough plastic containers with tight fitting lids and keep in secure buildings when possible. Take out trash the morning pick up is scheduled, not the previous night. Keep compost piles in containers designed to contain but vent the material.

(3.) Don't feed or try to pet coyotes! Keep wild things wild! Feeding, whether direct or indirect, can cause coyotes to act tame and over time may lead to bold behavior. Coyotes that rely on natural food items remain wild and wary of humans.



(4.) 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 easy prey and are at risk year round. Conflicts between dogs and coyotes occur primarily in the months of March and April when coyotes are setting up territories for raising of their young. The outcome of a confrontation between a small dog and a coyote depends upon the dogs behavior. A coyote due to its size will expect the small dog to be submissive. If the small dog does not submit, it could result in the dog eventually being killed. Medium and large sized dogs usually have little to worry about because they are of similar or larger size than the coyote. If confrontations occur it will be over territory and coyotes will usually yield yard areas to the dogs. In general, for the safety of your pets, it is best to keep them restrained at all times.

(5.) Feed pets indoors! Outdoor feeding attracts many wild animals to your door!

(6.) Keep bird feeding areas clean! Use feeders designed to keep seed off the ground as the seed attracts many small mammals that coyotes prey upon. Remove feeders if coyotes are regularly seen around your yard.

(7.) Close off crawl spaces under porches and sheds! Coyotes will often use crawl spaces for resting and raising young. Properly installed fencing will deter coyotes from entering these areas. Coyotes are excellent diggers, so fencing may need to extend into the ground.

(8.) Cut back brushy edges in your yard! These areas provide cover for coyotes and their prey.

(9.) Protect your vegetable garden and produce! Clear fallen fruit from around fruit trees and rotted vegetable from your garden.

(10.) Install perimeter fencing and exterior motion sensor lighting around yard areas! Coyotes normally will not scale fences unless they have a specific reason. A height of 6 feet is recommended. Coyotes are excellent diggers, so fencing may need to extend into the ground. Motion sensor lights at the edges of the property will also help distract coyotes

(11.) Educate your neighbors! Pass this information along since your efforts will be futile if neighbors are providing food or shelter for coyotes.

Resolving Conflicts with Coyotes

There are 3 main options for resolving conflicts with coyotes. These options are exercising tolerance, fencing and good housekeeping practices, and lethal removal.

1. **Tolerance**—Most conflicts with coyotes can be resolved by implementing some of the preventative tips noted above. Coyotes, as well as other wildlife, are continuously adapting to living with people and are opportunistic in finding foods and resources that are available. Living with wildlife requires that people be pro-active rather than re-active, in dealing with wildlife situations in their neighborhoods.

2. **Fencing and other good housekeeping practices**—also see above preventative tips.
3. **Removing Coyotes**—Coyotes are legally protected by New York State and Federal Regulations and there are specific procedures on how and when a coyote can be removed. *A coyote may not be removed simply because of its presence in an area, there must be damage or a threat to human safety by a specific animal.*

Coyotes are naturally afraid of people and their presence alone is not a cause for concern. If coyotes have direct access to human food, they can become habituated and may become more aggressive around people. Coyote behaviors that may indicate that the coyote has lost their fear of people are:

- 1) a coyote does not run off when harassed or chased;
- 2) a coyote approaches pets on a leash, and/or
- 3) approaches and follows people.

When you see any of the above behaviors, please notify the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Phone 845-256-3012, Environmental Conservation Office. NYSDEC is the authority concerning wildlife safety issues. *Please note, coyotes taking pets are not considered an immediate threat to human safety, therefore, the police department is not authorized to remove these wild animals.*

For More Information

***New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
21 South Putt Corners Road
New Paltz, New York 12561
Environmental Conservation Office—845-256-3013***

Other Resources

- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, publication “Coyote Conflicts”, available on website, www.dec.ny.gov/animals
- Urban Coyote Ecology and Management, The Cook County, Illinois, Coyote Project, Bulletin 929, 32 pages, available on website, www.urbancoyoteresearch.com
- Project Coyote, a wealth of articles and tips on living with coyotes, has a Coyote News Fact Sheet, see website www.projectcoyote.org/resources.html

References

This publication “The Eastern Coyote—Co-existing Strategies” was produced in response to increasing concerns regarding coyote sightings throughout New Castle neighborhoods. This information hopes to assist homeowners with living with coyotes and other wildlife. A lot of the information provided in this publication was adapted from articles provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, the Publication “Urban Coyote Ecology and Management”, The Cook County, Illinois, Coyote Project, and the “Co-Existing with Coyotes” publication produced by the City of Rockville, Illinois. We appreciate their support and permission to adapt their information for this publication.