MassWildlife

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.masswildlife.org**.

For more information contact *MassWildlife* at:

Western Wildlife District, Pittsfield: (413) 447-9789

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

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

Northeast Wildlife District, Acton: (978) 263-4347

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

or visit our website at **www.masswildlife.org**

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