

Coyotes in Chatham

The Eastern Coyote

Coyotes are currently living within our community. To make your property less attractive and to avoid having problems with them, here are some basic steps that ALL residents should follow:

- Do not feed coyotes! They become dependent upon and less wary of humans. Feeding ultimately alters the animal's behavior and encourages future visits to you and your neighbors. This can lead to potential problems (bites, scratches, encounters with pets). Note that Chatham fines residents who are feeding the wildlife.
- Do not leave pet food outdoors! If you must feed pets outside the home, provide only the amount that your pet will finish in one feeding.
- Do not approach or try to pet coyotes! Do not provoke an encounter with a coyote by coming too close or restricting its free movement
- Do remove all birdfeeders during the spring and summer months. Birdfeeders often attract small rodents such as squirrels, chipmunks and rats which are a food source for the coyote.
- Do secure your compost piles! Compost piles provide an easy food source for the coyote.
- Do secure your garbage! Coyotes knock over trash cans or tear open trash bags left in the open. Do not provide potential meals.
- Do secure your pets! Although free roaming pets are more likely to be killed by automobiles than by wild animals, coyotes and foxes do view pets as potential food. For the safety of your pet keep it restrained and supervised at all times. Do not leave pets unattended in invisible fencing which keeps your pet in but does not keep wildlife out.

The Coyote is a member of the same family to which foxes, dogs and wolves belong, the canids. Their name comes from the Aztec word for the species, "coyoti" which loosely translated means trickster.

Size

Coyote vary in size. Generally they are four to five feet long including the tail and stand 18" to 25" tall at the shoulder, weighing 20 to 50 pounds. A coyote may be gray, brown or tan above and white underneath with a straight bushy tail.

Habitat

Coyote are adaptable and can live in a wide range of climates and conditions from suburbia to wilderness and are now found in all states except Hawaii. Coyote are territorial, with the males marking boundaries as many canids do, with urine signposts. The size of the territory is directly related to the quality of the habitat and often it can take several square miles to support a coyote family.

Diet

Coyote are omnivorous and make use of an astonishing variety of plant and animal foods, including meat, garbage, insects, rodents, rabbits, birds, deer, carrion and even berries and fruits. Coyote play an important role in controlling rodents.

Reproduction

Coyote breed during February or March and give birth in April or May. The litter size varies upon the environmental conditions as well as coyote population density. The pups nurse for up to two months, mature quickly and are fully independent at about nine months.

Common Questions

Should I be concerned about coyotes attacking me or my pets?

Generally, coyotes are extremely shy and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Pets, especially cats and small dogs, are seen by coyotes as a food source and should be protected.

What should you do if you see a coyote?

If you see a coyote, make loud noises, yell, toss water balloons, a tennis ball and other objects in the general direction of the animal to startle it. By exhibiting these actions you are reinforcing wildlife's perception of you as a predator. Make sure that the coyote's natural fear of man remains acute.

Are coyotes nocturnal?

No, coyotes may hunt at dawn and dusk however are often seen during the day, especially when they have pups to feed during the summer months.

Do coyotes carry rabies?

Like all warm-blooded animals, coyotes may contract rabies. Report any unusual wildlife behavior to the Animal Control Officer, Meg McDonough at 508-945-5111

What is the Town of Chatham doing to protect citizens from the coyote population?

The coyote problem has been classified as a public safety issue. The Animal Control Officer, the Chatham Police Department and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Massachusetts Environmental Police are closely monitoring the behavior throughout the town and planning action accordingly.

For more information:

Chatham Police Department, Animal Control, Depot St. Chatham, MA
PH: 508-945-5111

Chatham Health Department, 261 George Ryder Rd., Chatham, MA
PH: 508-945-5165
http://www.chatham-ma.gov/Public_Documents/ChathamMA_Health/HealthDiv