

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife warns residents about coyote mating season, danger to pets

The eastern coyote is well established throughout 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, and rural areas. They 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.

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 weigh 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. They give birth in a den to 4–8 pups 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.

FOOD, HABITS, AND HABITAT

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. They 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 roadkills, rodents, and birds killed by cars, 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.

TIPS FOR RESIDENTS

Coyotes can thrive close to humans in suburban and urban areas. They require only a source of food, water, and cover. If you want to make your property less attractive to coyotes and avoid having any problems with these predators, follow these basic practices. Remember, share these tips with your neighbors; your efforts will be futile if neighbors provide food or shelter for coyotes.

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.

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 grills clean to reduce attractive odors.

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.

CLOSE OFF CRAWL SPACES: Coyotes will use areas under porches and sheds for resting and raising young. Close these areas off to prevent animals from using them.

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: 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.

PET OWNERS: 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 leashed at all times. Additionally, feed your pets indoors. Outdoor feeding can attract many wild animals.