



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."

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Preventing Conflicts with Eastern Coyotes

Coyotes are currently well established throughout the state from the Berkshires to Cape Cod. They thrive in suburban and urban areas close to people.

Coyotes eat many different foods, including small animals, fruits, vegetables, garbage, and pet food. Remember everything a coyote does is related to a potential meal.

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

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.

Secure 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.

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.

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.

Feed pets indoors

Outdoor feeding attracts many wild animals to your door.

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.

Close off crawl spaces under porches and sheds

Coyotes use such areas for resting and raising young.

Cut back brushy edges in your yard

These areas provide cover for coyotes and their prey.

Protect livestock and produce

Coyotes will prey upon livestock. Techniques, such as fencing, will protect livestock from predation. Clear fallen fruit from around fruit trees.

Educate your neighbors

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

Immediate Threat

If an immediate threat exists to human life and limb, public safety officials including ACOs, police departments, and the [Massachusetts Environmental Police](#), have the authority to respond to and dispatch the animal as stipulated in the Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 2.14 that pertain to handling [problem animals](#). This includes animals exhibiting clear signs of rabies.

If possible, MassWildlife should first be contacted to authorize the lethal taking of a coyote.

Coyotes taking pets are not considered an immediate threat to human safety, therefore ACO's and municipal police departments are not authorized to remove these wild animals.

Mammals

[Bats](#)
[Black Bears](#)
[Beavers](#)
[Bobcats](#)
[Cottontails](#)
[Eastern Coyote](#)
[Fishers](#)
[Red & Gray Foxes](#)
[Moose](#)
[Raccoons](#)
[Red & Gray Squirrels](#)
[Skunks](#)
[Woodchucks](#)
[White-tailed Deer](#)

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 100 Hartwell Street, Suite 230
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mass.wildlife@state.ma.us

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Resolving Conflicts with Eastern Coyotes

There are 3 main options for resolving a conflict with coyote. These options are tolerance, fencing and good husbandry practices, and lethal removal.

Tolerance

Most conflicts with coyotes can be resolved by implementing one of the preventative steps. The long-term solution is for the public to alter their behavior and be aware of their environment, whether they live in a rural, suburban, or urban setting. By adopting these recommendations, there may be a decrease in the frequency of seeing coyotes in the area.

Coyotes, as well as other wildlife, are adapting to the urban-suburban environments and are opportunistic in finding foods and resources available in these environments. Implementation of these steps empowers the public to be proactive, rather than reactive, in dealing with wildlife situations in their neighborhoods. MassWildlife's goal is to try to strike a balance between wildlife and people.

Fencing & Husbandry Practices

Coyotes can jump over and dig under fences that are improperly built. Coyotes don't leap fences in a single bound but, like domestic dogs, they grip the top with their front paws and kick themselves upward and over with the back legs. Their tendency to climb will depend on the individual animal and its motivation. Coyotes are also excellent diggers, therefore the type of fence you install may require barriers be built into or extending from the ground.

Eliminating the coyote's ability to grip the top of the fence is also recommended. You can do this by installing a PVC pipe that is free to spin around a tight wire. The height of the fence should be a minimum of 6 feet in height and tightly flush with the ground. If you have a lower fence, an outward overhang of fence wire may help prevent coyotes from jumping over.

Removing Coyotes

If you cannot tolerate a coyote living in your area, the only solution is to have it lethally removed. It is against state law to capture and release coyotes into another area. Often people want to capture problem animals and release them someplace else. However, moving wildlife is detrimental to both people and wildlife populations and is against the law. This law has been in effect for many years, protecting both people and wildlife.

Coyotes are a legally protected fur bearer and game animal. Therefore, there are statutory laws and regulations dictating 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.

As stated earlier, coyotes are naturally afraid of people and their presence alone is not a cause for concern, though depending on human-related sources of food, coyotes can become habituated.

- A habituated coyote may exhibit an escalation in bold behavior around people. The coyote has lost its fear of people when it exhibits one or more of the following behaviors. The coyote:
 - Does not run off when harassed or chased
 - Approaches pets on a leash
 - Approaches and follows people

When wildlife exhibit these behaviors, corrective measures can be taken.

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White-tailed Deer

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