Information About 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 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 remain active year-round and do not hibernate. Coyotes 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. When one hears a family of coyotes howling, it's easy to think the area is overflowing with coyotes, but it's usually just a few coyotes with their pups. Coyotes do not howl to announce a kill; this would attract other wild animals. Coyotes howl because:

- They're telling non-family members to stay out of their territory.
- They're locating their family members within their territory.
- They're advertising for a mate during breeding season.
- Pups practice howling and can be especially vocal in late summer as they attempt to mimic their parents.
- When there is a potential threat towards the pups, adult coyotes will scatter and howl in order to distract the threat away from the den site.

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 roadkills, rodents, and birds killed by cats, as well as garbage and pet food left outdoors. In suburban areas, they have been known to prey on unprotected pets, including house cats and small dogs.
Preventing conflicts with Eastern Coyotes
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 pickup 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.

Source: www.mass.gov
T&G Staff