



Coyotes in Massachusetts and Wakefield

The following are common questions and answers about coyotes living in Massachusetts.

Q. Where do coyotes live?

A. Coyotes can be found in nearly every town/city in Massachusetts.

Q. I have read that coyote sightings are increasing. Does this mean that the coyote population is growing?

A. No, an increase in sightings does not necessarily mean that the coyote population is growing. Coyotes are territorial animals that actively defend their territory from transient coyotes. This means that they travel between 2 to 30 square miles while patrolling their territory. A single coyote traveling through his territory may be reported several times, which may lead people to believe that there are more coyote then there really are.

Q. If a coyote is seen during the day is he rabid?

A. Coyotes primarily travel between dusk and dawn but during the spring and summer, when food needs are higher, they will move around during the daytime. This does not mean that they are rabid.

Q. How many coyotes live in each territory?

A. Each territory has a resident family unit which consists of an alpha male and female (they mate for life), possibly 1 or 2 “teenage” coyotes called associate/helpers, and during the spring and summer a litter of 2 – 4 pups.

Q. Why are coyotes seen more during the daytime in the spring and summer?

A. Like most animals, coyotes are giving birth to and raising their young in the spring, so during this time they have to search for more food to feed their young. Coyotes breed between February and March; the pups are born between April and May. Litters average approximately 3 pups that are weaned at 2 months old and fully independent at 9 months old..

Q. Why are coyotes drawn to urban and suburban neighborhoods?

A. Massachusetts is the third most densely populated state in the country, losing 40 acres of land a day to development. As habitat decreases, human and wildlife interactions increase. Coyotes are drawn to neighborhoods due to human encroachment of coyote habitat and for food and water, which is generally easily available in urban and suburban areas.

Q. Can a territory become “infested” with coyotes as stated in the media?

A. No. The resident coyotes do not tolerate other coyotes in their territory so it is impossible for an area to become “infested” with coyotes. Resident coyote defend their territories fiercely and will fight with intruding coyote to death if necessary

Q. Is it true that trapping restrictions have caused the coyote population to increase?

A. No. The Wildlife Protection Act restrictions on the recreational use of cruel and indiscriminate traps have no effect on the coyote population because Massachusetts has **never** used trapping as a method to manage the coyote population.

Q. How can I prevent conflicts with coyotes and other wildlife?

A. There are several simple steps you can do to minimize your chances of experiencing wildlife conflicts:

- Never feed a wild animal
- Avoid any contact with wildlife
- Keep trash securely covered or indoors
- Feed pets inside or supervise outdoor feedings/keep area clean
- Keep cats/dogs indoors and supervise them while outdoors
- Report any unusual behavior to local animal officials

Q. What are the most effective ways to prevent conflicts with coyote?

- A.** – Keep children, cats, and dogs indoors and supervise when outdoors at all times
- Keep pets up to date on vaccinations
 - Remove food and habitat sources for small animals like rodents (brush piles, wood piles, spilled bird seed, pet food/water, Koi ponds, and other water sources)

Additional Strategies

- Fencing (6 feet high and 1 foot below ground)
- Motion sensitive outdoor lighting
- Motion sensitive sprinklers
- Close off crawl spaces under decks, porches, and sheds
- Keep home in good repair
- Securing hobby livestock, rabbits, etc. in well-built pens
- Use livestock guard dogs, donkeys, llamas

Q. What should I do if I encounter a coyote?

A. Coyotes are usually afraid of humans but if you encounter one while hiking, etc. you should attempt to leave the area calmly (do not run) and make loud noises. If a coyote is in your yard, let the coyote know that it is not welcome by making loud noises (like banging pots and pans together), spray it with hose, toss tennis balls near the animal or use a party horn in a can – you want to scare them away, not hurt them. And NEVER attempt to touch, tame or feed a wild animal.

Q. Why can't we just remove coyotes from a town that does not want them?

A. Coyotes are part of the New England landscape and they are here to stay. Efforts to eradicate the coyote across the country have failed largely because of the coyotes' ability to adapt to changing circumstances and replenish their numbers. Removing coyotes is a short-term solution because it leaves the habitat open and transient coyotes looking for a territory will take the place of ones who are removed and the conflict will continue. The long-term solution is to focus on conflict prevention.

Q. The media says that coyote encounters are increasing. What is the chance of people and children being attacked by coyotes?

A. The reality is that the chance of being attacked by a coyote is extremely low. In fact, there have been only five people bitten by a coyote in Massachusetts since the 1950s – one animal appeared to have been fed and cared for by human beings and had become accustomed to people, two others tested positive for rabies and a third is suspected of

having rabies; another was not recovered after being shot by police. You have a greater chance of being seriously bitten by your own pet or hit by a car than attacked by a coyote.

Q. Why doesn't the Animal Control Officer do anything about them?

A. Coyotes are under the control of the State of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. As is all wildlife in Massachusetts. By law the Animal Control Officer can only intervene when an animal is non to be sick or injured. A single animal which can be positively identified can be destroyed, however just the mere fact of them in an area is not cause to destroy or remove them. 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. The Environmental Police is the law enforcement agencies in which you can call regarding coyote concerns at 1-800-632-8075

Q. Why do Coyotes Howl?

A. When one hears a family of coyotes howling, it is easy to get the impression that the area is overflowing with coyotes. In reality, there are usually just 2-6 coyotes, including the pups. Howling is the main way for coyotes to communicate with others.

Although some people find it unnerving, this howl serves many purposes, none of which are malicious:

- Coyotes are telling non-family members to stay out of their territory.
- Family members howl as a means to locate each other within their territory.
- Pups practice howling and can be very vocal in late summer as they attempt to mimic their parents.
- When there is a potential threat towards the pups, the older coyotes will scatter throughout the area and howl in order to distract the threat away from the den site.

Counting coyotes by listening to their howls can be quite difficult, even to a trained ear.

Usually it takes a trained researcher, familiar with the vocalizations of the pack, to differentiate the howls of individuals; two coyotes howling with their pups can often sound like many more.

Q. What do they eat?

A. Coyotes are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will feed on whatever is most readily available and easy to obtain. Their primary foods include fruit, berries, small rodents, rabbits, birds, snakes, frogs, and insects. They will scavenge on animal remains, including road-kills, as well as garbage and pet food left outdoors. In suburban areas they prey upon unprotected pets, including outdoor house cats and unsupervised domestic dogs. Because coyotes utilize so many different food sources, they have adapted to and live in a variety of habitats including urban and heavily populated areas.