



DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

Frequently asked questions and answers about coyotes living in Massachusetts

Q. Where do coyotes live?

A. Coyotes can be found in nearly every town and city in Massachusetts. They are adaptable to a wide range of habitats, including suburban, urban, and rural areas.

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

A. If you encounter a coyote in your backyard or neighborhood, you can help reinforce a coyote's natural fear of humans using hazing techniques. Let the coyote know that it is not welcome by making loud noises like blasting an air horn, spraying it with a hose, or tossing small objects near it and physically chasing it away. The goal is to scare the animal away, not hurt it. Children should calmly leave the area (do not run) and find an adult to haze the coyote. Never attempt to touch, tame, or feed a wild animal.

Q. Is it normal to see a coyote during the day?

A. Coyotes primarily travel between dusk and dawn, but coyotes can be active 24 hours a day. Coyotes are seen more during the daytime in the spring and summer as they are giving birth and raising their young. They are more active and may be seen more often as they search for food to feed their pups. Daytime activity is normal behavior and does not mean the animal is rabid. While coyotes can contract rabies, it is not frequently documented. A coyote exhibiting signs of rabies may display a lack of coordination, circling, paralysis, excessive salivation, self-mutilation, or aggressive behavior toward other animals and/or inanimate objects. Any coyote exhibiting these clinical signs should be reported immediately to the local Animal Control Officer and/or Police Department.

Q. What do coyotes eat?

A. Coyotes are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will feed on whatever is most readily available and easy to obtain. Their primary natural foods include fruit, berries, small rodents, rabbits, birds, snakes, frogs, and insects. They will scavenge on animal remains, including roadkill, and will readily consume garbage, compost, fruit and vegetable crops, and pet food left outdoors. Coyotes will consume birdseed and will prey on birds and small mammals attracted to bird feeders. Coyotes may prey upon unleashed pets, including outdoor house cats and unsupervised domestic dogs, as well as free-ranging livestock such as backyard chickens. Because coyotes eat so many different foods, they have adapted to live in a variety of habitats including heavily populated areas.

Q. How can I effectively prevent conflicts between coyotes and people?

A. There are several simple steps you can take to minimize your chance of experiencing wildlife conflict:

- Remove and secure all food sources from around homes and businesses
- Remove food and habitat sources for small animals like rodents (brush and wood piles, spilled bird seed, pet food, and water sources)
- Never intentionally feed a wild animal
- Keep trash securely contained or indoors
- Supervise young children when they are playing outside
- Aggressively haze coyotes any time they are encountered



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Additional Strategies:

- Install fencing (6 feet high and 1 foot below ground or with a skirt a few feet in length staked to the ground)
- Use motion sensitive outdoor lighting or sprinklers
- Close off crawl spaces under decks, porches, and sheds

Q. How can I protect my pets or livestock from coyotes?

A: You can protect your pets from coyotes by:

- Feeding pets inside or supervising outdoor feedings and keeping the area clean
- Supervising pets while outdoors, including having them under your control on a leash
- Keeping pets up to date on vaccinations
- Securing hobby livestock, chickens, etc. in well-built pens

Q. What is the chance of a person being attacked by a coyote?

A. The chance of being attacked by a coyote is extremely low. The majority of bites of humans can be directly attributed to intentional feeding of coyotes by people. You have a far greater chance of being seriously bitten by a domestic dog or hit by a car than being attacked by a coyote.

Q. Who should I contact if I'm concerned about coyotes?

A. Like all wildlife in Massachusetts, coyotes are under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. The mere presence of a coyote in an area is not cause for concern and coyotes taking pets are not considered an immediate threat to human safety. See the table below to determine what is normal, bold, or aggressive coyote behavior. If you are concerned about coyotes exhibiting very bold or aggressive behaviors, you can call your local Police Department or the MA Environmental Police at 1-800-632-8075.

Coyote Behavior	Progression
Frequent use of residential areas	Normal
Frequent daytime activity	Normal
Nighttime attack on <i>unsupervised</i> pet	Normal
Daytime attack on <i>unsupervised</i> pet	Normal/Bold
Attack on leashed pet (human present)	Bold/Very bold
Approaches or <i>closely</i> follows people, does not flee when heavily harassed	Very bold
Physically attacks people	Aggressive



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Q. Why do coyotes howl?

A. Howling is the main way coyotes communicate with each other. Although some people find it unnerving, this howl serves many purposes:

- Coyotes are telling non-family members to stay out of their territory.
- Family members are locating each other within their territory.
- Pups are practicing 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 to distract the threat away from the den site.

Counting coyotes by listening to their howls can be difficult, even for a trained researcher. Two coyotes howling with their pups can often sound like many more due to an auditory illusion known as the “beau geste” effect where sound is distorted as it moves through the environment.

Q. Is the coyote population growing in Massachusetts?

A. The eastern coyote population is well-established across mainland Massachusetts. An increase in sightings does not necessarily mean that the coyote population is growing. Coyotes are territorial animals that actively defend their territory from other coyotes. Each territory has a resident family unit. This family unit consists of the mated pair (alpha male and female), possibly 1 or 2 “teenage” coyotes (associate or helpers), and during the spring and summer, a litter of 2–12 pups (more typically 2–6). Coyotes can travel between 2 to 30 square miles while patrolling their territory. A single coyote traveling through their territory may be reported several times, which may lead people to believe that there are more coyotes than there really are. Additionally, coyotes change their activity patterns and territory usage throughout the year and year-to-year, so a change in sightings can simply reflect that change in behavior.

Q. Can an area become overrun with coyotes?

A. No. Resident coyotes do not tolerate other coyotes in their territories and will defend their territories fiercely and will fight with intruding coyotes.

Q. Can more hunting and trapping help control coyote populations?

A. No. Coyote populations are virtually impossible to control regardless of hunting and trapping levels due to the structures of their populations and their breeding ecology. Coyote populations self-regulate, and they will only produce as many offspring as an area can support given available resources. If food is more abundant, coyotes produce more pups.

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 coyotes 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 that are removed, and the conflict will continue. The long-term solution is conflict prevention and tolerable coexistence.