



DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

Understanding Coyotes Advice for Parents, School Officials, and Child Care Providers

Here in Massachusetts, there are many kinds of wildlife that thrive by living near people, including coyotes, red and gray fox, black bear, skunks, raccoons, wild turkey, and deer. In fact, almost all our citizens live in close proximity to coyotes and other smaller predators. This information focuses on coyotes, but also applies to foxes, another commonly seen wild canid (dog). Coyotes live in urban, suburban, and rural areas and are naturally wary of people, but can definitely become comfortable in neighborhoods where they are not discouraged (by noise and other forms of hazing) or are actually encouraged (by ready sources of food, provided either directly and indirectly).

Preventing Conflicts

Leave wildlife wild. People should never approach, touch, or give food to any animal (including a pet that doesn't belong to them). Such contact is not safe for people, pets, or wildlife.

Why?

- Normally, wild animals have a natural fear of people. However, sick or fed (including indirectly) wildlife may be more likely to lose the fear of people.
- Some children may think that a coyote (or fox) is someone's dog, and many more people are bitten every year in the U.S. by aggressive dogs than by wild animals.
- Outdoor cats and wildlife can carry diseases that can be spread to people through direct contact.

Keep food sources indoors or locked in outbuildings.

Why?

- Food (including snacks, pet food, birdseed, suet, and food-related trash) can attract coyotes, foxes, and other kinds of wildlife. Left outside, these foods encourage wild animals to visit residential areas or schoolyards more frequently. Prevent unwanted visitors by only feeding pets indoors, discontinuing bird-feeding, keeping dumpster areas clean, and using covered, secure trash barrels.
- Outdoor cats and wildlife can carry diseases that are spread when the animals feed in a concentrated area.

Spend time in your backyard; keep playgrounds, schoolyards, and trails mown and open.

Why?

- Wild animals, including coyotes and foxes, generally try to avoid people. This natural fear of people is reinforced when play areas, backyards, and trails are kept open and actively used by people. These animals are less likely to spend time or be seen in areas that are used by people, especially when people make noise to deter wildlife.

When Children See a Coyote Nearby

Some parents express concern about their children's safety when they see or hear about coyotes in the neighborhood. In the vast majority of instances, there is no cause for alarm. Despite close proximity and frequent sightings, physical contact with coyotes or coyote bites involving people are a rare occurrence. Since the 1950s, when the eastern coyote first appeared in Massachusetts, there have been very few confirmed reports of coyotes attacking people. Intentional feeding has directly contributed to many of these incidents. By contrast, according to the MA Department of Public Health, each year thousands of people are bitten by domestic dogs and require medical attention.

When children are at a bus stop, in a backyard or neighborhood, or on a playground, there's a chance they might see a coyote or a fox.

What to say to children: Never go near or try to feed wild animals or any animal you don't know. Talk loudly, so the coyote or fox knows you are there. Don't run, but slowly back away, toward a building or house. Make yourself look bigger by putting your arms over your head or opening your jacket.

Why?

- The animal might not be aware that you are there. Talking loudly makes sure the animal is not surprised and frightened to find that a person is nearby.
- Instinctively, coyotes and foxes (and pet dogs) will follow after anything that runs, including a person, so you don't want to run from them.
- The bigger you look, the scarier you look to an animal.

Find and tell an Adult

Why?

- Adults can harass and scare away these animals, to reinforce their natural fear of people. Adults can also quickly decide whether a wild animal or large dog is acting strangely or aggressively and can call Public Safety for help.

Coyote Basics

Coyotes are now found in every city and town in Massachusetts, except on the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Coyotes are frequently seen individually, in pairs, or in small groups where food is commonly found. A family group consists of an adult breeding pair, their pups, and, occasionally, the previous year's pups. Coyotes can be active night or day, and sightings at dawn or dusk are common.

For more information about coyotes, foxes, and other common wildlife, go to: mass.gov/masswildlife.

If you have exhausted these information sources but still have safety concerns or questions, contact the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife at (508) 389-6300, or email us at mass.wildlife@mass.gov.

If you decide that a situation requires an immediate response, contact local public safety officials by calling 9-1-1 or the Massachusetts Environmental Police at (800) 632-8075.

Continue to enjoy the great outdoors and your wild neighbors... from a distance!