

Facts About Coyotes

(from the MSPCA/AHES)

The coyote is a member of the same family to which foxes, dogs and wolves belong, the canids. Their name comes from the Aztec word for the species, "coyoti" which loosely translated means trickster. The Eastern Coyote is found in Massachusetts.

SIZE

Coyotes vary in size depending on location but generally are 4 to 4 1/2 feet long including the tail and stand 18 - 25 inches tall at the shoulder weighing 20 to 50 pounds. A coyote may be gray, brown or tan above and whitish underneath with a straight, bushy tail.

HABITAT

Coyotes are adaptable and can live in a wide range of climates and conditions from suburbia to wilderness, from sea level to over 10,000 feet and are now found in all states except Hawaii. Coyotes are territorial, with the males marking their boundaries, as many canids do, with urine signposts. The size of the territory is directly related to the quality of the habitat, and often it can take several square miles to support a coyote family.

DIET

Coyotes are omnivorous and make use of an astonishing variety of plant and animal foods including meat, garbage, insects, rodents, rabbits, birds, deer, carrion and even berries and fruits. Coyotes play an important part in controlling rodents.

REPRODUCTION

Coyotes breed during February or March and give birth in April or May. The litter size varies, depending, in part, upon environmental conditions as well as coyote population density. The pups nurse for up to two months, mature quickly and are fully independent at about nine months. The male coyote provides protection and food for the mother and offspring until the offspring are able to hunt for themselves.

COMMON QUESTIONS:

Q: Should I be concerned about coyotes attacking either me or my pets?

A: Generally, coyotes are extremely shy and avoid contact with humans. In urban and suburban areas, coyotes may be less likely to fear people and more likely to associate them with an easy, dependable food source. Some have been known to come up to the doors of homes if food is regularly present. Pets, however, especially cats and small dogs, are seen by coyotes as a food source and should be protected.

Q: What can I do to protect my pets from coyotes and other wild animals?

A: To prevent problems with coyotes and other wildlife, we urge people to:

- Never feed a wild animal.
- Avoid any contact with wildlife.
- Keep trash securely covered or indoors.

Feed pets inside or supervise outdoor feedings, and keep the area clean.
Keep cats and dogs indoors, especially at night, or stay outside with them.
Report any unusual wildlife behavior to your local animal control,
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife or the Mass. Environmental Police.

Q: Do coyotes carry rabies?

A: Yes. Like all warm-blooded animals, coyotes may contract rabies.

Q: How can I protect my livestock?

A: Innumerable non-lethal strategies exist to discourage coyote predation on livestock including guard animals (dogs, donkeys, llamas), smell and taste aversion substances, shock devices, noise devices and portable fencing. Poultry and hobby livestock can be well protected from coyotes with fencing (both structural and electric) and by ensuring that the animals are properly confined in well built cages or pens each evening.

Guard dogs may be the best choice for New England farmers. The effectiveness at reducing predation has been proven in both fenced and open ranges.

Q: Does the 1996 ballot question which restricted trapping have an impact on coyotes?

A: Historically, trapping has never been a method for managing coyote populations in Massachusetts, in the past twenty four years there has only been two land trapping seasons for taking coyote. Hunting is more commonly used in the commonwealth for killing coyote - coyote hunting season is four months long. If coyote should pose a threat to public health or safety, the trapping law allows for the use of leghold traps for capturing those problem animals. Because conflicts often occur in suburban areas trapping should be conducted responsibly.

For more information write, call or e mail-hagopian@mspca.org, Stephanie Hagopian Living with Wildlife Program at the MSPCA. 350 South Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02130, The coyote is a member of the same family to which foxes, dogs and wolves belong, the canids. Their name comes from the Aztec word for the species, "coyoti" which loosely translated means trickster. The Eastern Coyote is found in Massachusetts.