



## Eastern Coyote

The eastern coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a fairly recent resident of Rhode Island. When the settlers first arrived to the United States, they cut down forests to create farms and hunted large predators to protect livestock and to sell in the fur trade. This loss of habitat and severe hunting pressure led to the extirpation of large predators (wolves, bears, and mountain lions) from much of the Northeast, including Rhode Island. As settlers moved west across the country, developing land and altering habitats, the highly adaptable coyote simultaneously expanded its range east, until it was first documented in Rhode Island in the 1960s. With the lack of large predators, food sources were abundant, competition was non-existent, and coyotes quickly became established in our state. Coyotes now play an important role in controlling rodent and small mammal populations, a niche that needed to be filled. However, coyote populations can increase to unfavorable sizes with human-subsidized food resources, such as unsecured garbage cans and compost piles, or intentional feeding. Coexistence with the often misunderstood coyote is possible with education and community effort.

### LIFE HISTORY

**Range and Habitat:** The eastern coyote is a subspecies that originated from western populations. Their range expanded eastward as they fed on trash piles left behind on travel routes by colonists as they moved west. The range of eastern coyote now extends throughout the northeastern United States and into southeastern Canada. They inhabit all of Rhode Island except Block Island. Coyotes are habitat generalists, meaning they can survive in just about any habitat, as long as there is some form of food and shelter. They can live in fields, forests, and cities, and will den in rock crevasses, beneath brush piles, or under buildings.

**Behavior:** Coyotes are nocturnal and crepuscular, meaning they are most active at night and around dawn and dusk. However, it is not uncommon to see them out during the day, especially while they are raising their young in the spring. They live in packs which consist of the mating pair, first year pups, older pups, and occasionally transient adults. Coyotes can be heard howling at night to communicate with their pack. Although they are monogamous, they can establish a new mate, if necessary. A coyote's territory ranges from 5-25 square miles; they will mark and defend it against other canids. Coyotes are innately shy, but can become emboldened due to unnatural human interaction, such as feeding.

**Food Habits:** Coyotes are opportunistic and will eat nearly anything from food scraps in the garbage, to pet food, to compost or carrion. They are omnivores and their natural diet includes rabbits, squirrels, fruits, berries, etc. They can hunt deer, but usually only prey on fawns. It's much easier for a coyote to pick food from a trash can than it is for them to hunt, even though it may not be more nutritious. The more food resources humans supply through unintentional feeding, the larger the packs may be, because their breeding capacity is closely linked to the resources available to them.

**Reproduction:** In Rhode Island, coyote mating season runs from December through March. Pups are born in the spring, after a 2 month gestation period. Litter size can range from 4-7 pups depending on resource availability and the health of the female. Pups are born with eyes closed and weigh between 8 and 10 ounces. Females nurse the young during the first 2 weeks, until their eyes open. Both parents, and often older offspring, care for the young in the following weeks, alternatively leaving the den to fetch them food. Pups venture from the den around 3 weeks and gradually explore greater distances, eventually joining the adults to find food. Coyotes are fully grown at 9 months and will either remain with the pack or disperse.

### DID YOU KNOW...

- Coyotes can run up to 40 mph.
- Coyotes howl to communicate with their pack but not to indicate a kill.
- Coyotes have the greatest diversity in vocalizations out of all North American mammals.
- Eastern coyotes have a small amount of dog and wolf DNA, but they are not considered direct hybrids or "coywolves."
- Eastern coyotes are about half the size and weight of gray wolves. Coyotes weigh between 35-45 pounds.
- Coyotes run with their tails down, while dogs run with their tails up.
- Coyotes usually mate for life. Coyote fur color is diverse; individuals can be gray, grizzled, brownish-red, black, tan or "blonde."

## THREATS

Coyotes are susceptible to various diseases and parasites, such as [ticks](#), fleas and heartworm. Although coyotes can carry [rabies](#), there have only been 2 reported cases in Rhode Island since 1994. They can also contract sarcoptic [mange](#) and [canine distemper](#). Pet owners should ensure their pets are properly vaccinated and call a veterinarian if their pets come into contact with any wildlife.

## LIVING WITH COYOTES

### **Will a coyote attack me?**

Coyotes are naturally shy animals, but unnatural interaction with humans can cause them to become emboldened. Simply seeing a coyote isn't cause for alarm; not all coyotes have learned bad behaviors. If you see a coyote, it may just continue on its way. If the coyote stops or is inquisitive, remain calm, make loud noises, try to look big and intimidating, and slowly back away. **DO NOT** attempt to approach the coyote or turn and run away. **If the coyote attempts to approach, go inside and report the observation to the Environmental Police: (401) 222-3070.**

### **Am I feeding a coyote?**

Coyotes are opportunists, and will eat anything they can find. You may not be tossing steaks outside as a treat for them, but could unintentionally be providing food through other means. Take an inventory of your yard to look for things that could be a potential food source for coyotes. The more resources we provide, the larger the population will be, and the more conflicts will develop.

### **Can coyotes be trained?**

Coyotes can be trained to be wary of humans. We don't want coyotes associating humans with food and shelter, so we must train them to be cautious around us. If you see a coyote, make loud noises, bang pots and pans, shout or make a coyote shaker by sealing loose pennies in a soda can. Frightening coyotes may not seem kind on the surface, but it will actually protect them in the long run. For more information visit: [coyotesmarts.org](http://coyotesmarts.org).

### **Why can't we just cull the population?**

It has been repeatedly proven that removing coyotes to reduce the size of a population results in the opposite outcome. Fewer coyotes means more available territories and less competition for food. With this increase in resources, the surviving coyotes produce larger litters, resulting in population growth. Removing human-subsidized food resources, combined with regulated hunting and trapping, is the most effective way to manage coyote populations.

[For in-depth information on living with coyotes, view the RI DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife's Eastern Coyote Management and Response Guide.](#)

## REGULATORY STATUS

Coyotes are classified as protected furbearers under *RIGL 20-16-1*. They may be trapped or hunted using legal methods during the regulated season. In Rhode Island, state law (*RIGL 20-16-2*) allows a property owner to kill, by legal means, any furbearer (as defined in *RIGL 20-16-1*) that is killing or attempting to kill any livestock or domestic animals, destroying crops, creating a health hazard, or causing economic damage to their property. However, the law does not allow for the random taking of wildlife, for the taking of furbearers for their pelts outside the open season, or for killing of animals outside the boundaries of the property of the person with the problem. Also, it does not allow for unlawful methods of take such as poisons, snares, foothold traps, or discharge of firearms in violation of state or local ordinances. The law states that animals taken must be reported to the DEM within 24 hours. The DEM does not recommend that property owners attempt to live trap nuisance furbearers unless they are prepared and willing to euthanize the offending animal. **State regulations prohibit the live capture and translocation of furbearers.** Captured furbearers can only legally be released on the property on which they were captured.

## TIPS FOR PREVENTING PROBLEMS WITH COYOTES

- Remove or secure any outdoor food sources such as trash bins, dumpsters, compost, pet food, and gardens.
- Trash should be secured in containers and only put out on the curb the morning of trash collection.
- Do not place meat scraps or fatty items in compost piles. Make sure compost is secure.
- Avoid feeding pets outside or bring in dishes at night.
- Secure livestock in pens or buildings. Electric fencing can be used to protect chickens and rabbits.
- Keep pets indoors unless supervised.

### **Never intentionally feed coyotes.**

It is illegal in Rhode Island and will create problems for humans and coyotes alike.

### **TO REPORT A COYOTE SIGHTING:**

Contact RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife  
Great Swamp Field Office: (401) 789-0281

In the case of an EMERGENCY please contact the  
Division of Law Enforcement: (401) 222-3070