Rhode Island Department
of Environmental Management

Division of Fish and Wildlife

Wild Rhode Island

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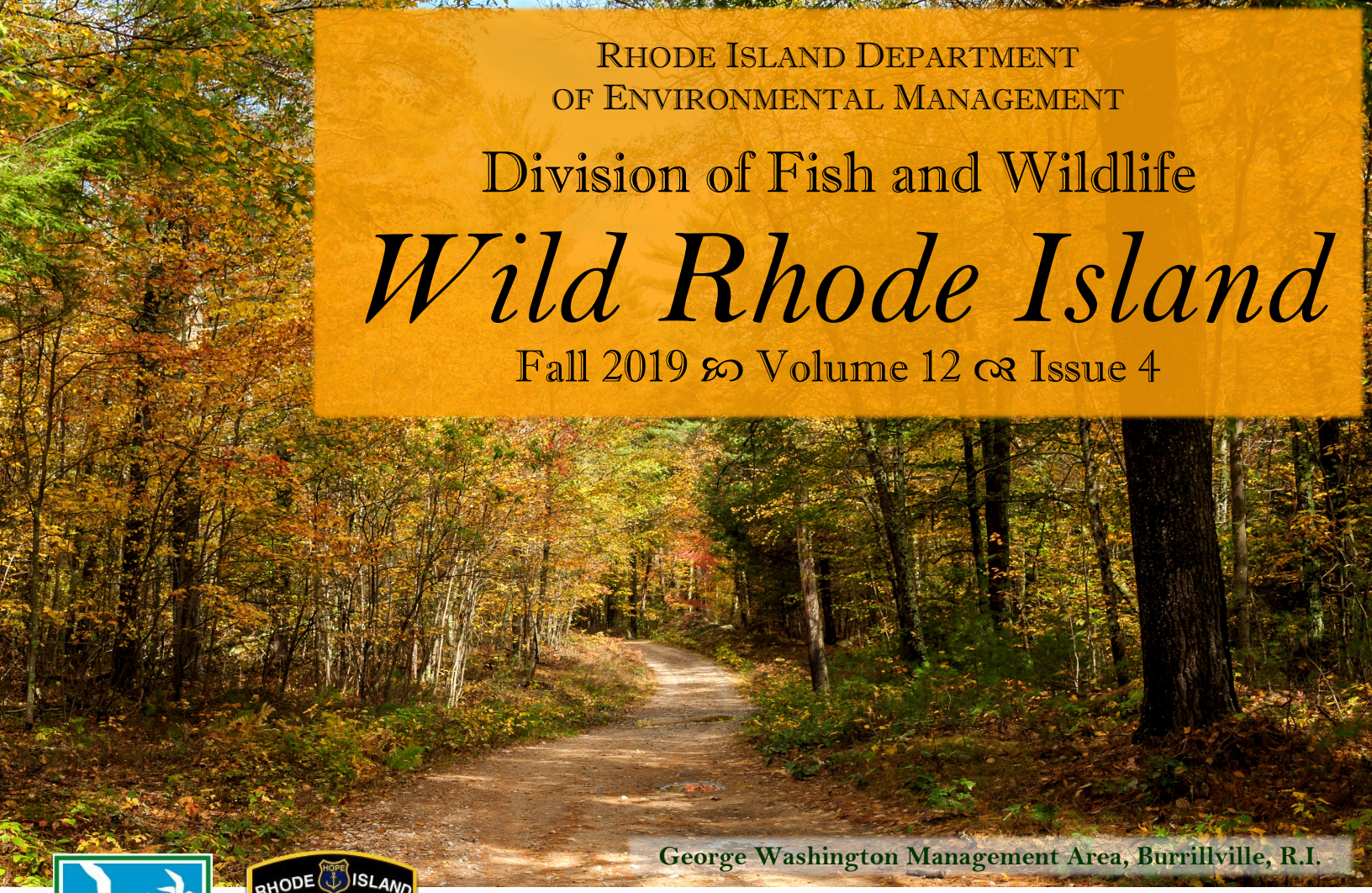

George Washington Management Area, Burrillville, R.I.

Inside This Issue:

DFW *Coyote Management & Response Guide* Coming Soon

By: Sarah Riley, Division of Fish & Wildlife

Chances are you have heard about coyotes in Rhode Island in the news, on social media, or maybe you've even seen them in your own yard. These days, coyotes seem to be getting more attention than ever before. It may be an increase in their exposure in the media, changing land use throughout the state, or the coyote's unique reproductive capacity, but all indications are that this wild canid has found a home here and isn't going away any time soon.

This is not a bad thing. Coyotes play an important role in our ecosystem; as Rhode Island's largest carnivore - and largest wild canid - they control wildlife populations such as rodents, small mammals, and deer. This in turn benefits habitats and ecosystems which would otherwise be negatively impacted by over-browsing. They also control populations of wildlife which are vectors for disease or hosts to disease-bearing parasites.

Continued on page 6

The Division of Fish and Wildlife

Our mission is to ensure that the freshwater, wildlife, and marine resources of the state of Rhode Island will be conserved and managed for equitable and sustainable use.

Photos of George Washington W.M.A by Mike Stultz

This Issue Features:

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George Washington Management Area, Burrillville, R.I.

Featured State Land, RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife

Written by: Sophie Clode, Division of Fish & Wildlife

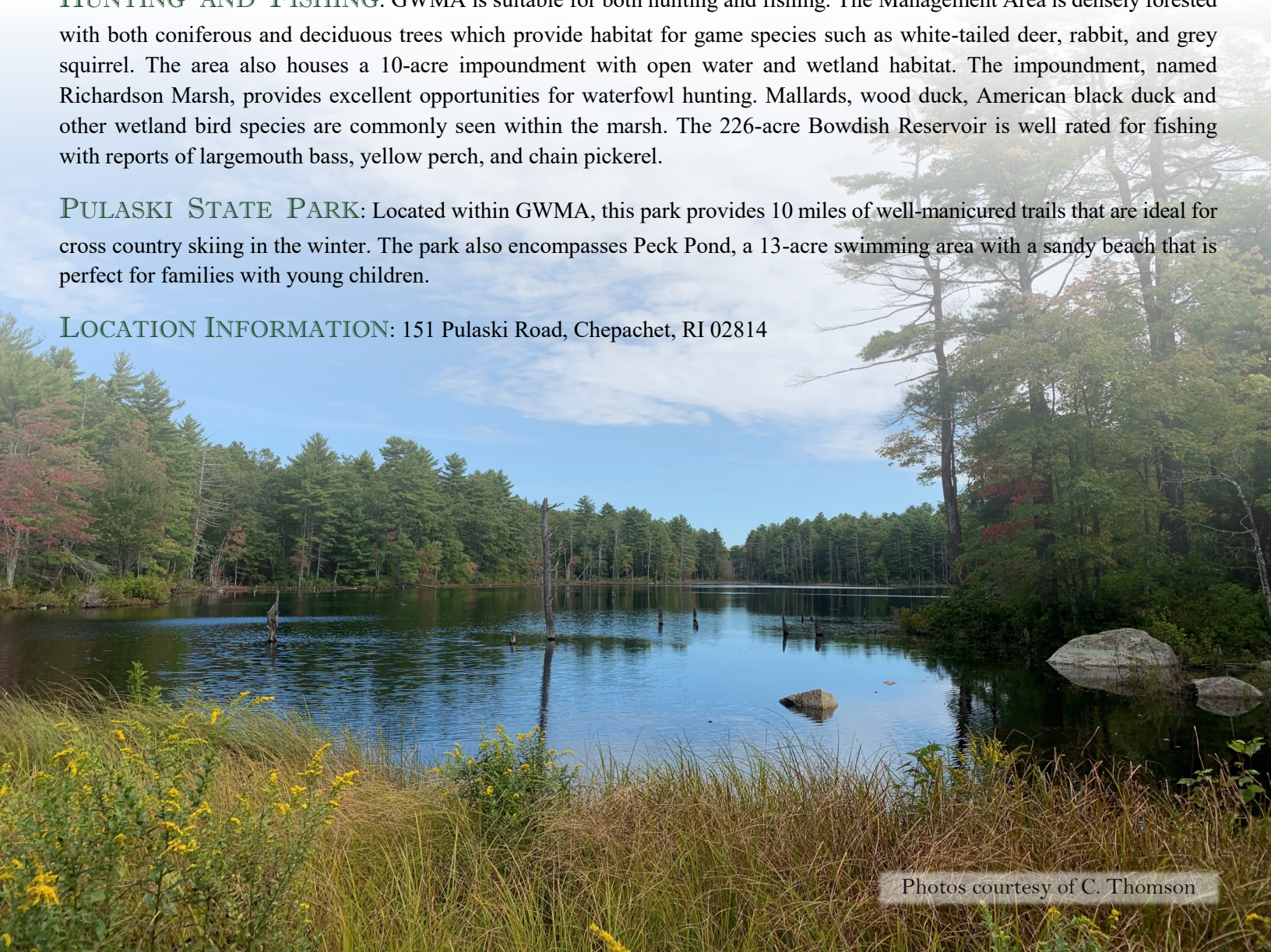
In the northwest corner of Rhode Island lies George Washington Management Area (GWMA), one of the state's largest Management Areas. GWMA spans 4,000 acres that provides ample recreational opportunities. The land was first acquired and developed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program created during the Great Depression that gave young men the chance to work on environmental projects throughout the country. The property was then turned over to the State of Rhode Island during World War II. Today, RIDEM manages the land so that it can be enjoyed by the public for a variety of activities. GWMA is an all-purpose recreation area with opportunities for camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, cross country skiing, and more.

Camping: The Management Area contains a 100-acre camping area which contains 45 camp sites suitable for tents, RVs, and trailers with a permit acquired through the RIDEM Forestry Division. Two Adirondack-style cabins can be rented out for group camping trips for up to 20 guests. The camp has frontage on the Bowdish Reservoir which is open for swimming and boating. Surrounding the camp are several miles of hiking trails with allowance for leashed dogs and horses. For more information about camping at the George Washington Management Area, contact the Division of Forest Environment by calling 568-2013 or emailing Cj.Paliotta@dem.ri.gov.

Hunting and Fishing: GWMA is suitable for both hunting and fishing. The Management Area is densely forested with both coniferous and deciduous trees which provide habitat for game species such as white-tailed deer, rabbit, and grey squirrel. The area also houses a 10-acre impoundment with open water and wetland habitat. The impoundment, named Richardson Marsh, provides excellent opportunities for waterfowl hunting. Mallards, wood duck, American black duck and other wetland bird species are commonly seen within the marsh. The 226-acre Bowdish Reservoir is well rated for fishing with reports of largemouth bass, yellow perch, and chain pickerel.

Pulaski State Park: Located within GWMA, this park provides 10 miles of well-manicured trails that are ideal for cross country skiing in the winter. The park also encompasses Peck Pond, a 13-acre swimming area with a sandy beach that is perfect for families with young children.

Location Information: 151 Pulaski Road, Chepachet, RI 02814



Photos courtesy of C. Thomson

Meet the Newest Addition to the Division of Fish & Wildlife: Jennifer Kilburn

We are excited to announce the hiring of our newest Principal Biologist, Jennifer ("Jenny") Kilburn. As our gamebird biologist, she will oversee and conduct work associated with waterfowl and other gamebirds (*e.g.,* turkey, mourning dove). She will also serve as our technical representative on the Atlantic Flyway Council. Jenny supersedes Josh Beuth, who transferred to the RIDEM Division of Law Enforcement earlier this year.

Jenny has a significant wildlife background and experience gained from previous employment at the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) where she worked for several years on a variety of projects. These included assisting with developing a wild turkey monitoring protocol, as well as capturing and tagging waterfowl, black bear, bobcat, and cottontail rabbits. In the past she assisted the Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife on sea duck research.

In the spring of 2018, Jenny completed her Master's degree from the University of Connecticut in Natural Resources with a focus on Wildlife Management. There, she worked on developing a sightability model for white-tailed deer aerial surveys, analyzed the affects of biological, weather and landscape variables on white-tailed deer fawn survival, and researched how hunting affects white-tailed deer movement and behavior. Recently, she wrote a Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) response plan for the state of Connecticut and coordinated their CWD collection efforts.

Kilburn worked in CT studying clapper rail nest success and survival rates. Photo courtesy of J. Kilburn

Jenny grew up fishing and hunting with her family, through which she has become an avid conservationist.

"I look forward to blending my experience in research and data analytics with my passion for hunting and conservation to make informed decisions that allow for healthy, sustainable game bird populations in the state of Rhode Island." - Jenny Kilburn, Principal Biologist, Gamebird Program

Welcome Jenny!!

The 2019-2020 Hunting Regulation Guide is Available Now

Pick up a copy at sporting shops around the state, at the RIDFW Great Swamp office, or online using your computer or mobile device. Stay informed of hunting season dates, changes to laws, new hunting areas, harvest tagging, and much more.

Go to www.eregulations.com/rhodeisland

Tips For Releasing Fish

If fish are to be taken as part of the daily creel limit, they should be killed immediately and kept cool until they can be prepared for the table. If an angler wishes to release a live fish, either because it is undersized or because they are practicing catch and release fishing, the following procedures are recommended:

1. Land the fish as quickly as possible to minimize stress to the fish. Playing a fish to the point of exhaustion will lessen its chance for survival.

2. Wet your hands before handling the fish; dry hands will remove the fish's protective slime layer and leave the fish open to bacterial and fungal infections.

3. Handle the fish carefully. Do not use excessive force when grasping the fish. Do not put fingers into the gill cavities or eye sockets. A wet glove can be a useful aid in grasping the fish because it reduces the amount of pressure needed to hold the fish securely.

4. Gently remove the hook to minimize damage. A pair of long-nose pliers will make the job easier.

5. If you are intentionally practicing catch and release fishing, use artificial lures with single, barbless hooks, or circle hooks to minimize damage to the fish.

6. Do not attempt to remove a hook that is deeply embedded in the gullet. Instead, cut the line off as close to the hook as possible and release. The fish will have a better chance of survival if the hook is left in place; research has shown it will eventually be pushed out like a splinter.

7. Return the fish to the water as quickly as possible. Lower it back into the water in an upright position and move it back and forth in the water to force water across its gills. Once the fish revives, allow it to swim away.

Photo courtesy of C. Pelletier

For more information about freshwater fishing in Rhode Island, see our Freshwater Fishing Guide by visiting: www.eregulation.com/Rhode Island

Purchase your freshwater fishing license online today at:

https://www.ri.gov/dem/huntfish

Log-in and purchase or reprint this year's license. If you're new to the online system, click "Create your RIHFID account" to get started!

This highly-adaptable, intelligent animal makes a living for itself finding food opportunistically, and this may lead them into cities, neighborhoods, and yards. Observing a coyote in a neighborhood during the day doesn't necessarily mean that it is sick, or that there is any danger. It is normal for coyotes to travel throughout their home range, which may take them into suburban and urban areas.

The DFW will be publishing a *Coyote Management & Response Guide* to provide the public and policy-makers with information on coyotes, why and how coyotes can become a nuisance, and what we can do to prevent or resolve nuisance wildlife issues. It will build off of the policy published by RIDEM in 2006 titled *Management & Response Protocols for Incidents Involving Coyotes*, which can be found on the dem website at www.dem.ri.gov. Below are some sections that will be included in the new guide.

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INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) is responsible for managing the state's natural resources in an equitable, sustainable, and ecologically sound way. The Division continues to address issues regarding eastern coyotes; working with residents, officials, police departments, and housing authorities to resolve human-coyote conflicts, as well as to address underlying circumstances which may be precipitating these incidents. Human safety is a priority of RIDEM. To this end, these regulations and policies aim to protect Rhode Island residents and visitors from dangerous situations involving coyotes, as well as enforcing scientifically-sound and ecologically-conscious coyote management practices. We must acknowledge and remember that a variety of ecological, social, and legal constraints associated with reducing human-wildlife issues make these efforts increasingly complex.

Coyotes first became established in Rhode Island in the mid 1960s when the expansion of their range, through natural dispersal, spread to southern New England. Since then, these highly-adaptable animals have learned to thrive across the state. Increasing exposure to humans has emboldened some coyotes, making them more likely to search for food in suburban and urban neighborhoods. Intentional feeding, as well as unintentional feeding, through unsecured food sources such as garbage, compost, bird feeders, gardens and small pets, provide food for coyotes, and may create or worsen nuisance coyote issues.

It is important to remember that not all coyotes are a nuisance, pose a threat to people or pets, or are "out of place" in suburban and

Photos courtesy of USFWS

urban settings. Often, coyotes pose no threat to the public, and provide an ecological service. Most nuisance coyote behavior can be discouraged by removing attractants, and using deterrents and hazing techniques. RIDEM will intervene when a dangerous coyote poses a threat to public safety. However, it is not the responsibility or mission of RIDEM remove wildlife deemed a nuisance by a property owner.

Residents are best equipped to respond to non-dangerous, nuisance coyotes quickly, consistently, and effectively, in their own backyards and neighborhoods while the coyote is still present. Therefore, RIDEM encourages residents to use these tools and methods on their properties, and to share this information with neighbors, homeowner associations, local businesses, friends and family. Efforts to minimize human-coyote conflicts are most effective when a community collaborates to these ends. Each situation involving coyotes is unique and may require unique strategies to resolve; using the most current, science-based management techniques will not only be most effective, but will also be most beneficial to both humans and coyotes.

"*Why Can't We Cull the Coyote Population?*"

Cull: To lethally remove individuals with the goal of reducing a population

Throughout history, people cohabitating with coyotes have tried to eradicate them due to fear of predation on their livestock and agricultural loss. They have been persecuted for hundreds of years – hunted, trapped, poisoned - and yet their populations have continued to expand all across the country. Lethal control is effective in removing an individual, but not as a population control strategy due to the coyote's unique physiology and life history. Research has shown that lethally-controlled populations respond to the increase in available territory and resources by greater numbers of surviving individuals breeding, and increased litter sizes.

Although culling can be effective in the short term to remove individuals – this significant reproductive capacity means that lethal control can cause the coyote population can grow over time.

In the event that there is a dangerous coyote which endangers the health and safety of the public, the RIDEM Environmental Police will attempt to dispatch it. In many cases of non-dangerous, nuisance coyotes in neighborhoods, a visit by a RIDEM Law Enforcement Officer or DFW Biologist may not be practical or necessary. Mitigation of nuisance coyote situations requires a coordinated effort between residents, local authorities, and RIDEM. Coyotes can be harvested by legal means any time of the year on private land, and property owners have the right to dispatch a coyote which is depredating their livestock or pets, or destroying property as long as it does not violate state and local law.

Not all coyotes have bad habits or create problems. A coyote walking down the street during the day or walking through your yard should not immediately be perceived as dangerous or malicious. Coyotes have been part of Rhode Island's fauna for more than fifty years, and are an important natural resource and component of the ecosystem. As proven in the West, campaigns to eradicate coyotes, though sometimes effective at lowering population levels for a short time, are expensive and have proven unsuccessful in the long term. The coyote's reproductive capacity and ability to disperse into new areas ensures that unoccupied habitats will not remain so for long. Wildlife managers and scientists researching coyotes believe that the best way to minimize human – coyote conflict is to remove attractants from our yards, and "educate" local coyotes using hazing techniques to teach them to avoid neighborhoods and people.

"*Why Can't We Relocate the Coyotes?*"

It is not uncommon for RIDEM to receive a request from an individual or community asking to trap a coyote, or pack of coyotes, and release them elsewhere. Although this may seem like the simplest and most humane solution, for many reasons it is not; wildlife relocation may cause more harm to the coyotes, other animals, habitats, ecosystems, and people. It is also unlikely to resolve the issue because coyotes will travel long distances to return to their home range. We must also consider what will happen after we relocate an animal to a new place; where will it find food and shelter? How will it impact, or be impacted by, the habitat? What parasites and diseases could it bring with it? All of these questions need to be addressed when considering trapping and transporting wild animals and are ultimately why relocating wildlife is prohibited in Rhode Island. For all these reasons, and others, as a policy the DFW does not remove or relocate wildlife.

Relocation is Ineffective

Faced with unfamiliar surroundings, competition for limited resources, and possibly having been separated from their pack, relocated coyotes will often attempt to return to home ranges or breeding sites. Many animals have excellent homing skills. Coyotes have demonstrated that they can travel great distances to return to the point of capture. Some will not survive the journey as they attempt to cross roads or potentially killed as they pass through someone's property.

Relocation Does Not Change Behavior

It is likely that the nuisance animal, relocated elsewhere, will continue this behavior in someone else's yard or neighborhood. It is worth considering how we would feel about our neighbors releasing nuisance wildlife onto our property. We have to ask ourselves: Are we resolving our issue by creating an issue for someone else?

Nuisance coyote issues will not be resolved without first removing or minimizing the attractants that brought the coyotes to the neighborhood in the first place. Simply removing one coyote, or a pack of coyotes will just free up that food/shelter for another coyote or pack of coyotes, other wildlife, or small mammal populations (now unchecked by coyote predation).

Potential Spread of Disease

Coyotes, like all wild animals, can carry a wide variety of parasites and diseases. These diseases can quickly spread between animals and have devastating consequences on a population. A person relocating wildlife may think they are helping one animal, when in reality they are putting all animals in the area at risk. Moving animals randomly around the landscape will increase the chance of introducing diseases into uninfected populations. You cannot tell if an animal is sick just by looking at it. An animal that appears healthy may carry diseases or parasites which can be transmitted to susceptible species, domestic animals, or humans. Traps and cages used to capture, or transport animals can become contaminated by disease-carrying organisms, creating potential exposure risks to humans and pets.

Harm To Ecosystems and Other Wildlife

A wild animal trapped and relocated to a "green space" does not automatically have everything it needs right there. It must now struggle to find food and water sources in this unfamiliar territory. Relocated wildlife, faced with the threat of starvation and competition from other wildlife, will seek food and shelter wherever available. Releasing them into wildlife management areas and refuges will increase predation of local wildlife. Keep in mind, these management areas and wildlife refuges are often set aside to protect vulnerable species, and introducing predators to this area would negate those protections.

Any animal introduced to a new habitat must compete for resources with the wildlife that lives there. Competition for resources increases stress and conflict. Many wildlife species are territorial and will vigorously defend their territories against others; animals without established territories are at an immediate disadvantage and their odds of survival are compromised.

Lethal population control and relocation are not viable options and will not resolve nuisance coyote issues, but taking action to prevent and mitigate nuisance issues can be by removing or securing food sources and den sites and using coyote deterrents and hazing techniques.

Removing Coyote Attractants

There are almost always only two reasons why a coyote is remaining in an area:

- There is a food source
- There is a good denning/shelter site

By removing or modifying these, you remove the underlying cause of the coyote's presence in the area. This will make hazing and deterring efforts more effective, and minimize the chance of another coyote moving in to take its place.

Attractants may not be obvious at first. A hole under a porch or behind a bush may go unnoticed, but it may provide a great denning site for a family of coyotes. Coyotes may venture closer to homes looking for easy food sources like gardens, bird feeders or pet food. They may also have den sites in proximity to "human-habitat" like seasonally-residential neighborhoods, cemeteries, or public parks. We sometimes inadvertently provide great wildlife habitat by creating an area with ample shelter, food, and water sources. Performing a yard audit may help you identify attractants so that you can remove them, secure them, or minimize access to them.

Take the time to thoroughly survey your property for potential den sites and food sources that coyotes and other wildlife may be taking advantage of.

Remember: Putting out food for wildlife will attract <u>ALL</u> wildlife. Feeding squirrels, deer, turkeys and other wildlife is not only illegal, it can cause nuisance wildlife issues for you and your neighbors. You cannot pick and choose which wildlife come to eat the food you put out, so the only way to avoid issues is to not put out food. Help keep wildlife safe and wild!

Conducting a Yard Audit

The purpose of a yard audit is to identify any attractants which may be bringing coyotes into your yard or neighborhood so that they can be removed, secured, or avoided in order to minimize the chance of precipitating nuisance wildlife issues. It may not be your yard, but a neighbor's yard, or a local business. Talk to your neighbors and community about coyote issues; they may not know their actions are attracting coyotes.

Coyote Deterrents & Hazing Methods

Coyotes have learned to find resources in urban and suburban areas, as well as the many other habitats they utilize. With so much exposure to people, and typically no clear threat of danger, coyotes may occasionally forget their healthy fear of humans and become emboldened. When this happens, they are more likely to venture closer to homes looking for food and shelter. It is important that we "re-educate" coyotes to be wary of people, and to discourage them from using neighborhoods as habitat. It is better to have a population of "educated" coyotes in an area, providing the many ecological benefits that predator species provide, than to have many "uneducated" coyotes causing nuisance issues and potentially presenting a threat to people or pets.

This will not only keep coyotes away from us, but it will also be safer for the coyotes, because they will be less likely to be hit by cars, or killed as a nuisance animal. Remember that not all coyotes seen in neighborhoods and cities are dangerous, they may just be exhibiting typical coyote behavior.

The goals of hazing are to:

- Discourage coyotes from entering public areas or yards when people are present
- Reverse the habituation of coyotes to people, teaching them to fear and avoid humans
- Discourage coyotes from approaching people and pets
- Empower residents by giving them tools to use when they encounter a coyote, thereby reducing their fear of coyotes
- Increase awareness about coyote behavior among residents and involve the community in coyote management efforts

Hazing uses harassing techniques without physically harming the coyote. Using a variety of different hazing tools is critical because coyotes can become desensitized to the continued use of a single technique, sound or action. The more often an individual animal is hazed, the more likely its behavior will be changed.

- Use **active hazing** by:
  - yelling, waving your arms and clapping loudly
  - making loud noises (screaming, banging pots and pans, using an air horn, blowing a whistle)
  - spraying them with a hose
  - throwing objects like tennis balls towards them

  IMPORTANT: Never use these techniques on a coyote that is cornered or with pups. Coyotes will defend themselves and their pups under these circumstances.
- Employ **passive hazing** by:
  - installing motion-sensing sprinklers and lights
  - leaving a radio playing outside
- Educate your neighborhood; these techniques are most effective if used consistently, frequently, and when the whole neighborhood works together.

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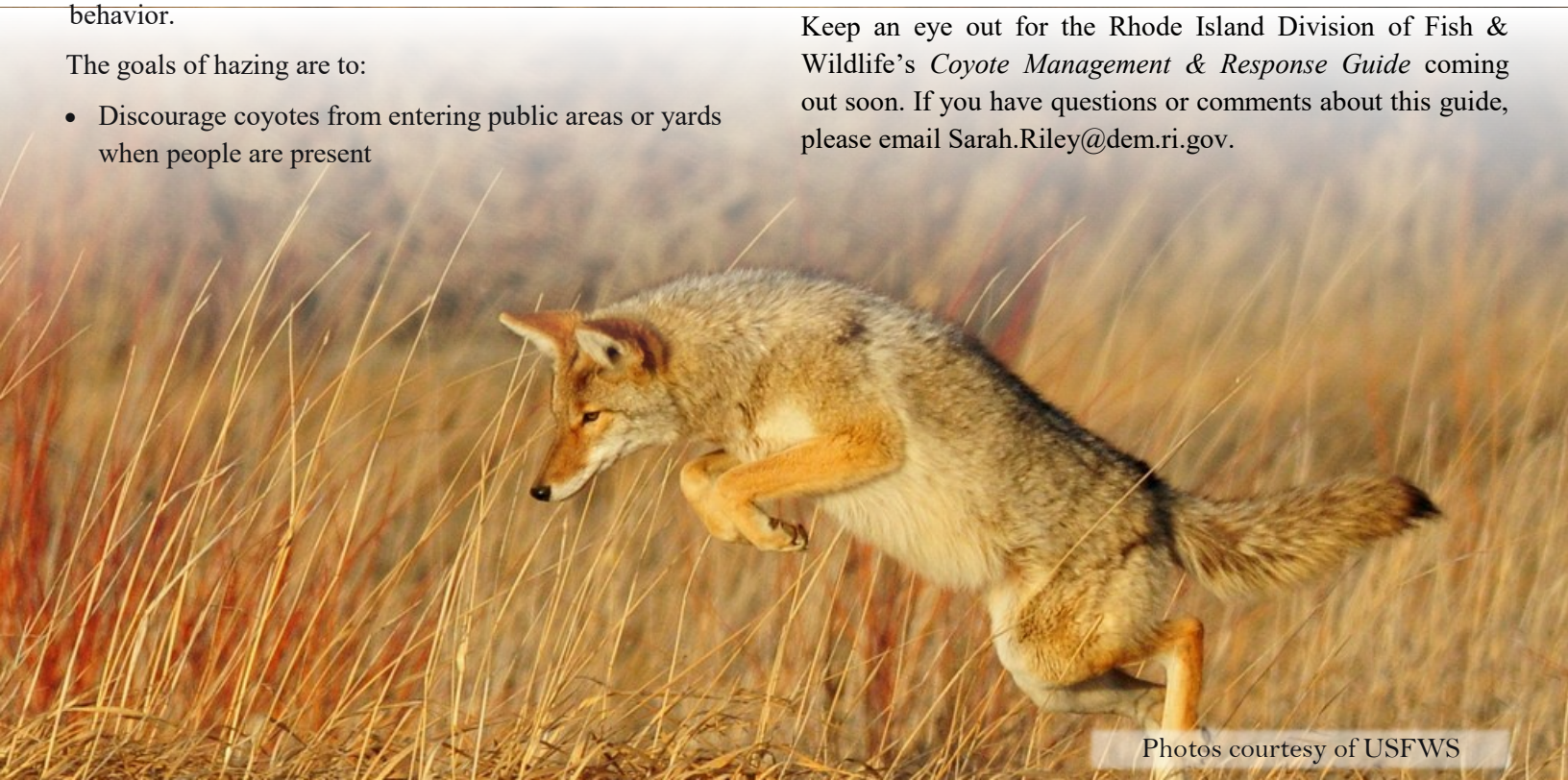
Keep an eye out for the Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife's *Coyote Management & Response Guide* coming out soon. If you have questions or comments about this guide, please email Sarah.Riley@dem.ri.gov.



Photos courtesy of USFWS

Keep Calm and Carrion:
A Closer Look at Rhode Island's Vultures

By Gabby DeMeillon, Division of Fish & Wildlife, Outreach Office

Most everyone has witnessed the soaring silhouette of a vulture circling silently in the sky. Misinformation has cloaked these birds in mystery and fear for generations; however, these fascinating animals have evolved a unique and impressive list of adaptations which contribute a great deal to our local ecosystem.

There are two species of vultures that can be found in Rhode Island; most commonly the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) and, more rarely, the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*). These vultures are members of the Cathartidae family. Interestingly, these "New World vultures" of North and South America are not closely related to the "Old World vultures" of Africa, Asia and Europe. Although the two share many similarities and perform the same ecological role, their likeness is the result of *convergent evolution*, whereby unrelated species adapt similar physical and behavioral traits to fill a similar ecological niche. The New World vultures are actually more closely related to storks than other birds of prey.

Turkey vultures can be distinguished from other large raptors in flight by observing the "V", or dihedral, shape in which they hold their wings, as well as watching for the distinctive "tipping" motion they make as they ride columns of warm air, known as thermals, in search of food. Black Vultures hold their wings in a flatter position, and the ends of the wings are a distinct silver/white color, which look like "hands" or "stars". If you are lucky enough to see either of these vultures up close, the two can be distinguished by the color of their head; the turkey vulture has a reddish/pink head, and the black vulture has a darker, grey head. A group of vultures is called a committee, venue or volt; a group in flight is called a kettle.

Vultures are notorious scavengers, often feeding on carcasses left behind on roads as a result of car strikes. Unlike most other birds, turkey vultures have an excellent sense of smell and will travel for miles in search of food, often aggregating in large numbers, along with black vultures, around a carcass. Black vultures have been known to take live prey, but this is much less common in turkey vultures. Vultures have relatively weak feet compared to hawks and eagles, however, they have incredibly strong beaks which allow them to tear into their meal, sometimes working as a team to pull apart tougher carcasses.

While myths proclaim that vultures spread disease, in truth they help ensure the opposite. Vultures have an excellent immune system and cannot contract botulism, anthrax, cholera, or salmonella and they stop the spread of disease by removing dead animals from the environment. To prevent carrion from becoming affixed to and soiling their feathers, vultures lack feathers on their heads.

A committee of black vultures gathers by a shoreline. Photo courtesy of USFWS

Vultures using the sun to warm themselves. Photo courtesy of USFWS

Although we commonly see vultures while they are in search of food, they are very shy in their choice of nesting habitat. Vultures nest in remote areas, away from humans. Their nests are not much more than a hole in a log, ledge of rock or scrape on the ground, but they will return yearly to a nesting location where they have previously been successful. Vultures mate for life and their courtship display consists of a follow flight where one individual will trail behind the other as they swoop and dive through the air. Both parents care for their young and chicks will stay in the nest for about 2 to 3 months before fledging. Once they leave the nest, juveniles usually stay in a family pair and continue visiting the roost site for up to 3 months before moving on to find new territory.

Vultures can be seen roosting in large numbers with wings spread early in the morning. Other large flocks, or kettles, of vultures can be observed during migration in northern populations. Southern populations tend to abstain from migrating, but may do so under certain circumstances such as unusually harsh winters. While migrating, vultures will follow mountain ranges and use updrafts, soaring effortlessly to conserve energy, traveling up to 200 miles a day until they reach their wintering grounds, south of the U.S. border.

Vultures are equipped with several unique and bizarre adaptations. They will sun themselves to gain heat, but if their body temperature becomes too elevated, they will urinate on their legs to cool down. This “urohidrosis” serves a dual purpose, decreasing body temperature through evaporation while additionally killing off any bacteria with the acid in urine. When threatened, they make a quiet hissing sound, similar to a paper being torn, as they lack a syrinx. As an alternative method of defense, they will vomit, decreasing their body weight for a more agile escape from predators.

Once persecuted and trapped due to false legends, their numbers are now on the rise. However, the consistent threat lies in rodent poison; after the target animals (mice and rats) have perished, vultures will unknowingly consume the toxic meal. This has been a concern among populations of other birds of prey as well, including owls, hawks and eagles.

Common as they are, a vulture in flight always catches the eye and provides a moment of serenity during a long drive. They may not be the most “classically beautiful” bird found in Rhode Island, but they are a captivating and important part of our ecological community.

The distinct red head of the turkey vulture distinguishes it from the black vulture. Vulture photos courtesy of USFWS

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News from the Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife

DFW Outdoor Education Events

(Register by emailing Scott.Travers@dem.ri.gov)
1B Camp E-Hun-Tee Place, Exeter, RI
November 3rd - Tree Stand Safety Class
November 17th - Small Game Mentored Hunt

Winter/Community Fly Tying Event

November 4th, 18th & 25th, December 2nd, 9th & 16th - Cold Spring Community Center, North Kingstown, $5.00/person. For more info call DFW Outdoor Education Office at 401-539-0019

Opening Days (hunting)

October 19th - Pheasant, fox, squirrel, rabbit, quail
November 2nd - Muzzleloader Deer
December 7th - Shotgun Deer

Opening Days (trapping)

November 1st - Mink, muskrat, skunk, raccoon, opossum, weasel, fox, rabbit
November 1st - Coyote on State Land
November 1st - Beaver on Private Land
December 1st - Beaver on State Land
December 1st - Fisher

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