

The Facts about Coyotes or Coy Dogs

“Coyotes fill the role of a natural predator, a role that is important for maintaining the dynamics and health of our ecosystems”.

(Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2016)

History of Coyotes in New England

“The Eastern coyote moved from west of the Mississippi and first appeared in Vermont in the late 1940s” as humans wiped out top level carnivores in the East. That vacant niche allowed coyotes to fill the void. It is generally larger than its western ancestor because it gained size by breeding with wolves on the journey east. The resulting Eastern coyote has developed the ability to live close to people and eat a variety of foods while its larger size enables it to survive in the deep-snow winters. [VT Fish and Wildlife Dept., 2016](#)

Diet of Coyotes-Predators of Opportunity

As the top carnivore in some environments, coyotes may function as keystone predators helping regulate the number and density of smaller mesocarnivores (skunks, raccoons, foxes). In this way, coyotes help maintain healthy ecosystems and local biodiversity. (www.earthisland.org)

“We kill approximately 500,000 coyotes every year (worldwide). Considering that one coyote eats at least five rodents per day that could amount to an additional 9 billion rodents per year.”
(Dr. Paquet, University of Calgary, 2016)

Coyotes hunt both by day and by night and tend to take advantage of whatever foods are easiest to obtain: rodents, rabbits, deer, insects, fruit, and carrion. They will also take advantage of accessible food including garbage and pet food. (www.earthisland.org)

Breeding habits and pack dynamics

Coyotes often live in organized social packs. They can also live as solitary individuals or in monogamous pairs.

- Breeding season peaks in mid-February followed by 4 to 8 pups born in April or May
- Reproduction is generally limited to the pack’s leaders, the dominant male and female. (www.earthisland.org)

“Coyotes are density dependent breeders. As the number of coyotes in an area decreases, their reproductive rates increase. Coyote control efforts are therefore often unsuccessful because they tend to stimulate reproduction.” [VT Fish and Wildlife Dept., 2016](#)

Lethal “control” of coyotes can disrupt the group hierarchy which allows more coyotes to reproduce, encouraging larger litters because of decreased competition for food and habitat, and increasing pup survival rates. (www.earthisland.org)

Persecution of Coyotes

At least 400,000 coyotes are killed each year by federal, state and local governments as well as by private individuals. Most are killed through aerial gunning, *calling* and shooting and use of snares (USDA, Wildlife Services, 2008)

- *Calling*: Hunters are now using computer generated calls that mimic the sound of a coyote in distress or a downed animal. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate.
- Most states set no limit on the number of coyotes that may be killed, do not have limited hunting seasons nor do they regulate the killing method.
- *Coyote Killing Contests*: the aim of killing contests or derbies is to kill the most or biggest animals for cash. Many hunters refuse to participate in these events because they believe contests violate even the most basic ethics. In most contests, wildlife is discarded as trash. In Vermont, coyotes may be killed 365 days a year for any reason or no reason contrary to the widely accepted North American Wildlife Management Model - a model the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife embraces.

How to coexist

“Statistically, coyotes are not a significant threat to your safety. Lightning, cows and deer pose a greater risk.” <http://www.projectcoyote.org/>

Livestock owners can prevent depredations via a number of livestock husbandry improvements: removal of livestock carcasses and afterbirth; bringing livestock inside a barn when birthing or sick or injured; and the use of properly installed electric fences.

“If left alone, family groups and populations are stable, with first year pup mortality at 50-70%. If we kill pack members, other members can begin breeding more often and the result is more coyotes.” (Dr. Paquet, University of Calgary, 2016)

Impact of Coyotes on Deer Populations

“In fact, less than 10% of adult deer mortalities are caused by coyotes.”
[New York State Conservationist June 2014](#)

Although people suspect coyotes kill lots of deer, recent research conducted by SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry biologists has shown that the majority of adult deer coyotes eat are scavenged.

Tracking coyotes with GPS collars, researchers located 62 deer carcasses visited by coyotes. Cause of death was determined in 39 of the carcasses: 36 were scavenged, and only 3 were killed by coyotes. Further, deer killed by coyotes had previous injuries making it easier for coyotes to kill them. Coyotes did kill fawns during spring and summer; around one-third of coyotes' summer diet consists of fawns. However, coyotes in the Adirondacks currently consume more beaver than fawns. [New York State Conservationist June 2014](#)