

Coyote Coexistence

Coyote sightings are not uncommon throughout Western New York and at this time of year when foliage is bare, you may easily see coyotes more often. Coyotes are afraid of people and typically avoid interactions, but with the timing of their natural life cycle, seasonal changes, and changes in their habitats and surroundings, these factors may bring coyotes into sight and contact more often.

January and February is the mating period for coyotes. Coyotes mate for life and control reproduction rates and litter sizes when the pack structure remains stable. They are attentive parents, teaching their children natural boundaries and food sources, which is why disruption of coyote pack structure can change their biology and behaviors. During spring, coyotes will select their dens and prepare for having pups. Once the pups are born in March and April, the parents take care of them over the spring and summer and work to protect and educate them.

As coyote sightings may increase January through May, so might coyote-human interactions. Coyotes looking for mates may travel more often through neighborhoods and the coyote parents taking care of their families will be more protective when coming across people or pets that are near their homes. By understanding coyote behavior and ecology and by applying common sense and using proven coyote hazing techniques, we can minimize potential conflicts and appreciate the wildlife diversity that is within our environment.

Removing food and shelter sources to reduce coyote interactions:

Coyotes are keystone predators and play a vital role in maintaining the balance of local ecosystems. They are important in controlling rodent populations, which is their primary diet source, and they also eat carrion, fruits, vegetables and other small mammals.

- Remove potential food sources from your yards (unsecured trash or compost, pet/livestock food left outside or unsecured, bird seed fallen from feeders, fallen fruit) – not only are they potential coyote food sources but they also attract the wildlife, such as the rodents, that are natural prey for coyotes.
- Pick up dog feces as this can attract coyotes to your yard or areas.
- Do not feed coyotes – anywhere or at any time!
- Check your yard, outdoor buildings and porches for openings that wildlife may want to enter to make a den or nest – repair broken boards to eliminate openings.
- Never allow a coyote to linger or bed down near your home – scare it away.

How to scare away the coyotes you encounter outside:

Coyotes are very curious and visual animals and they will observe you just as you observe them and if you are walking and you stop, they will also stop to see what you are doing. Applying simple, low intensity scare techniques – known as hazing – will tell the coyotes that they are not welcome near you or in your yard.

- In a very firm and loud voice, yell “Go away coyote!” and wave your arms above your head. Make yourself big and loud!

- To be even louder to scare away a coyote, you can also use a shaker can (coins/pebbles placed in a metal can), whistles, air horns, bang pots, and you can throw small objects towards and not at the coyote, or pop open an umbrella.
- Do not turn your back or run from a coyote and do not allow your pet to chase or harass a coyote.
- Pick up small pets and small children when you see a coyote near you.
- To deter them from entering your yard, you can use flashlights, motion-operated lights, tape-recorded human noises, and ammonia-soaked rags.

Protecting pets:

Coyotes are most active between the hours of dusk and dawn. Potential nighttime conflicts from other wildlife can also occur as owls, hawks, eagles, and fox can also prey on pets such as cats and small dogs. Coyotes may see small pets as food, especially with habitat and environmental changes, and may see them as a threat to their territory or their pups.

- Keep pets under your watch and control - accompany your pets on a leash outdoors after dusk, especially in backyards (unfenced and fenced). Keep pets indoors at night or enclosed in kennels.
- Obey local leash laws when walking dogs in yards, neighborhoods, and parks.
- Keep cats indoors to protect them - letting cats roam can actually draw coyotes into the area.
- Keep chickens, rabbits and other small animals in covered enclosures, constructed with heavy mesh wire. Coyotes, raccoons and weasels can break through chicken coop wire.
- Neuter pets - although a rare occurrence, coyotes may mate with domesticated dogs.

Coyotes are generally reclusive animals who avoid human contact. The best approach, for their benefit and ours, is not to habituate them. Do not feed them - keep them wild and wary of people. Do not approach them and teach children that all wildlife should be admired from a safe distance far away and not approached. By promoting respect, compassion and education, the community can safely coexist with coyotes and all wildlife.

If you have questions or concerns about coyotes in your backyard, contact the Erie County SPCA to speak to wildlife experts at 716-629-3528 or email wildlife.spcaec@gmail.com. (After hours 716-712-0251).

Coming this spring to Grand Island, a coyote educator will conduct an educational presentation all about coyotes to share information and experience on coyote ecology and conflict resolution. Look for event information coming soon!

For more coyote education, visit the following web sites:

Coyote Watch Canada: <http://coyotewatchcanada.com/>

Project Coyote: <http://www.projectcoyote.org/>

Educational information courtesy of Coyote Watch Canada and Humane Society of the United States.