

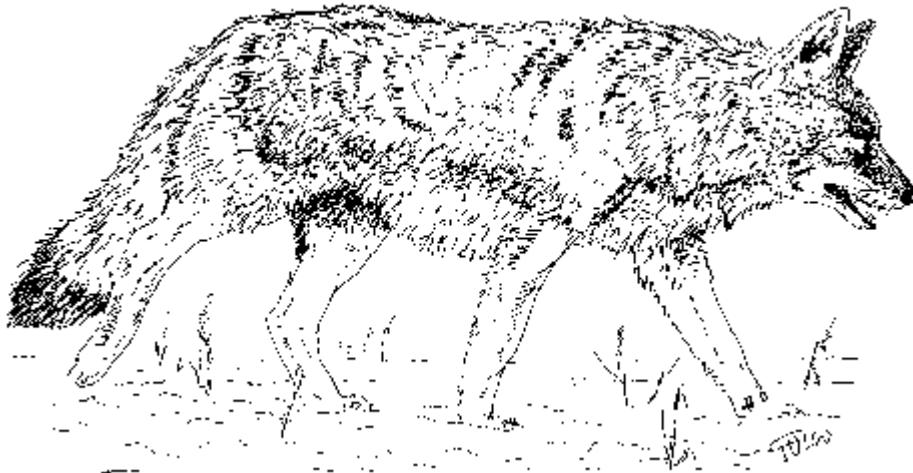


WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

INFORMATIONAL SERIES

COYOTE

Canis latrans



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Habitat: Frequents most habitat types; brushy fields, farmland, and wetlands fringes are particularly valuable. Found in both rural and suburban areas.

Weight: Most adults weigh from 25 to 40 pounds, with males typically heavier than females.

Length: About 4 feet long from nose to tail.

Food: Opportunistic feeders; they eat primarily mice, white-tailed deer, woodchucks, and rabbits. They will also feed on birds, insects, fruits, and berries.

Identification: A typical coyote resembles a small, lanky German shepherd, but several characteristics distinguish it from a dog. Coyotes tend to be more slender; have wide, pointed ears; a long, tapered muzzle; yellow eyes; slender legs; small feet; and an uncurled, bushy tail which is carried low to the ground. The pelage (fur) is usually a grizzled-gray color with a cream-colored or white underside but coloration is variable with individuals having blonde, reddish, and charcoal coat colors. Coat color does not vary between the sexes. Most coyotes have dark hairs over the back and a black-tipped tail, which has a black spot near its base covering a distinctive scent gland. However, not all coyotes have the black markings.

Range: Originally an inhabitant of the western plains of the United States, the coyote now occurs from Alaska south into Central America and east from the Atlantic Provinces to the southeastern United States.

Reproduction: Coyotes do not normally mate for life, although some pairs may stay together for several years. In Connecticut, the breeding season is from January to March, and the gestation period is about 63 days. Although adult animals can dig their own dens, they usually enlarge an abandoned woodchuck or fox burrow. The female prepares and maintains the den site. Pups are born in the spring (April to mid-May), and litters range in size from one to as many as 12 pups; the average in Connecticut is seven. Both adults care for the young and will readily move them if disturbed. Pups are weaned at about six to eight weeks and begin foraging and hunting with the adults when they are eight to 13 weeks old. The family group usually breaks up in the fall or early winter when the young disperse. Young coyotes may travel long distances in search of new territories, giving this species a rapid potential for colonization. Although nearly full grown by their ninth month, eastern coyotes may not breed until they are nearly two years old, unlike western coyotes, which reach breeding age their first year.

History in Connecticut: Not a native species, the coyote is now part of Connecticut's ecosystem, having extended its range eastward from the Midwest during the last 100 years. Coyotes were first reported in Connecticut in the mid-1950s. For the next 10 years, most coyote reports were from northwest Connecticut. Since then, they have expanded their range throughout the state. The coyote is one wild animal species that has adapted to human-disturbed environments and can thrive in close proximity to populated areas.

Interesting Facts: The coyote is also nicknamed brush wolf, prairie wolf, or coydog. Eastern coyotes are generally larger in size than their western counterparts. There are several theories for this difference in size but none are conclusive.

Coyotes use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with one another. Howls, yelps, and high-pitched cries are best known, but they also bark, growl, wail, and squeal. Two coyotes howling in unison can create the illusion of a dozen or more performing in concert. Usually, coyotes are most often heard around dawn and dusk. However, they may respond to sirens and fire whistles at any time of day or night.

The coyote's social unit consists of the adult pair and their young; they may be encountered singly, in pairs, or in groups of three or more. Mated pairs maintain territories which are scent-marked and defended against other coyotes as well as foxes. Coyotes do not form packs with members other than the adult pair and young. Their senses of hearing, sight, and smell are well developed.

Coyotes normally run as fast as 25 to 30 miles an hour, but they can run 35 to 40 miles an hour when pursued. They are also strong swimmers.

Management of Problem Coyotes: Problems caused by coyotes include depredation on livestock, depredation on pets, and concerns for human safety.



Coyotes will attack a variety of livestock but sheep and fowl are at greatest risk. Coyotes pose very little danger to horses and cattle. The probability of a coyote attack can be reduced by penning susceptible livestock and poultry at night. Some fences effectively exclude coyotes but require careful maintenance. Guard dogs have been used successfully to reduce coyote depredation. The removal and proper disposal of dead poultry or livestock is highly recommended as a preventive measure. Carrion left in the open may attract coyotes and bring them into close and more frequent contact with live animals. Livestock owners may use trapping or shooting to remove coyotes that have attacked their animal stock.

Coyotes will attack and kill pets, especially cats and small dogs. Pets can be protected by limiting their time outdoors, concentrating their outdoor activity to fenced areas, and by direct supervision. In addition, homeowners should eliminate other sources of attraction to coyotes including pet food left outdoors, table scraps on compost piles, and decaying fruit below fruit trees.

Coyotes seen near homes or in residential areas rarely threaten human safety. Coyotes are abundant across North America, yet only a very small number of attacks on humans have ever been reported. Like many animals, coyotes can grow accustomed to buildings and human activity. Homeowners should eliminate any food sources that may be attractive to coyotes. Nuisance coyotes can be harassed with loud noises (shouting, or banging pots and pans) or spray from a garden hose to encourage them to avoid certain properties. Homeowners should realize that if they live near suitable habitat, fencing may be the only method to completely eliminate coyotes from travelling near homes. In rare cases, where coyotes approach humans or where human presence is high, efforts to remove coyotes may be justified.

Coyotes are most active at night but may be active during daylight hours particularly during the young-rearing period and longer days of summer. Daytime activity by coyotes, in the absence of additional evidence, is not indicative of rabies. Coyotes appear to have low susceptibility to the "raccoon" or mid-Atlantic strain of rabies found in Connecticut (during 1991 to 1997 over 3,000 tested raccoons were rabid while over the same period only one coyote tested positive for rabies). Coyotes are susceptible to strains of rabies that occur elsewhere in North America and to the other common canine diseases such as canine distemper. Sarcoptic mange, a parasitic disease, can affect large numbers of coyotes, particularly when the population is dense and the chance of transmission is high. In Connecticut, many are also killed on the highway by automobiles.

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