

CoyoteSmarts

First seen in Rhode Island in the 1960s, coyotes can now be found in every part of the state except Block Island. They arrived on Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands in the mid-1990s, making their way from the mainland by swimming or crossing one of the islands' three bridges. By 2005, coyotes became a regular sight even during the day as they expanded their territories from farmlands and open spaces into suburban and urban areas.

The Narragansett Bay Coyote Study (NBCS) was initiated that same year to attempt to determine what was responsible for the apparent increases in coyote numbers. Since 2005, NBCS research has shown that throughout the islands the increasing coyote presence has a lot to do with food. The NBCS is currently working in Newport County to develop regionally tailored management and coexistence strategies.

Through its parent organization, The Conservation Agency, NBCS joined forces in 2013 with the Potter League for Animals, Rhode Island Natural History Survey, Aquidneck Land Trust, and Norman Bird Sanctuary to launch *CoyoteSmarts*, a major public information initiative. In 2019, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission joined the group. With funding from the Prince Charitable Trusts and the RI Foundation, the initiative will help raise public awareness of coyotes, promote public and pet safety, and encourage best coyote management practices.

Coyote Biology Relates to Management

- 🐾 Coyotes are different from deer, which depend on predators to control their population size.
- 🐾 Since coyotes are top predators they have to control their own numbers – nothing eats them to bring their numbers down.
- 🐾 Coyote litter size can be related to food abundance and availability. More food resources mean more puppies and higher survival rates.
- 🐾 Coyote population density can increase in areas with abundant food resources.
- 🐾 With less food both coyote numbers and population density decrease.



It follows that if we can identify and control the availability of food resources the coyotes are using, coyote numbers will decrease. NBCS calls this "Passive Coyote Management."

Why Not Shoot Them?

Lethal control programs are costly, time consuming, and rarely effective. In suburban and urban areas lethal control options may be hindered by legal constraints and concerns for safety of people and domestic animals. Trying to get rid of coyotes by killing them is a logistically impossible task since most of them are discrete, shy, and virtually invisible. Inevitably, the ones that are missed sense the increase in available food, produce more pups, and rapidly restore the population to former levels.

In extreme cases where habituation has occurred and the coyotes are exhibiting aggressive behavior, removal by lethal means may be the best short-term solution for problem individuals. Since shooting, trapping, and poisoning, can be unsafe or illegal in closely built neighborhoods, NBCS recommends being proactive about coyote management to make sure habituation does not occur.

People Cause Coyote Problems

Using GPS tracking, NBCS has found humans directly and indirectly provide thousands of pounds of food to coyotes each year. Excessive coyote reproduction occurs wherever people are subsidizing coyotes significantly. Coyotes can produce many more offspring than they need to replace pack members. The young spread out and fill any available habitat on the island. For that reason there is no such thing as an isolated coyote problem on Aquidneck Island. Portsmouth's problem is Newport's problem and visa versa.

We can manage coyotes - get them to drop their own numbers - if we aggressively manage ourselves. If the island municipalities decrease the food subsidies we are collectively providing to coyotes - their populations will stabilize at lower levels. To avoid bold coyotes foraging in residential areas make sure no one ever

feeds them or they will learn to associate people, and your neighborhood, with food. Be a good neighbor and don't feed coyotes.

Easy Pickings: Human Handouts



Intentional and unintentional coyote subsidies:

- Road-killed animals, especially deer, are dumped or not properly disposed of
- Unsecured food, garbage, or compost
- Dead farm-livestock dumping
- People feeding feral cats or wildlife
- People intentionally feeding coyotes



Problem:

- Fat coyotes are fertile coyotes
- Coyotes respond to abundant food resources by producing more offspring
- Coyote populations increase
- Coyotes get habituated when they associate people with food – they may get bold and aggressive

Solutions

The NBCS has prepared a set of guidelines for the Newport County municipalities: "Best Management Practices for Coexistence with Coyotes on Aquidneck and Conanicut islands." Encourage your local and state government to adopt and implement these guidelines for a safer community and a sustainable relationship with coyotes.

Narragansett Bay Coyote Study
www.theconservationagency.org/coyote



Living Safely with Coyotes

- Never feed coyotes or leave out food that might attract them. Don't feed their puppies.
- Secure trash. Coyotes eat everything: fruit, cereals, meats, small animals, and garbage.
- Never feed pets outside.
- Bring your small pets inside at night or accompany them in heavily used coyote areas.
- Any pet spaniel size or smaller, or tied, is at risk.
- A safe cat is an indoor cat. Outdoor cats or cat colonies are a magnet for coyotes.
- If coyotes are staring at you, or following you, they probably think you are going to feed them.
- Remember many coyotes are trained to expect food from people.
- If you are uncomfortable with coyotes near you, act big, mean, and loud. A soda can full of pennies makes a good noisy shaker and should scare them away. If noise alone does not work throw something. Coyotes are very nervous animals and should leave especially if it looks like you are going to approach them.
- If you feed them you are part of the "coyote problem." Remember: fat coyotes are fertile coyotes. They have plenty of natural foods here - including mice, rats, woodchucks, rabbits, geese and deer - they don't need more.
- Habituated coyotes can be dangerous because they are apt to approach people and may become aggressive. Problem individuals may need to be removed and euthanized. You are not doing a coyote any favor by feeding it: a fed coyote is a dead coyote.

Working Together

The Narragansett Bay Coyote Study (NBCS) is working with local and state government and the public to develop viable management and coexistence strategies for the eastern coyote in RI. We are addressing the issue of coyote subsidization and population growth by creating Best Management Practices to reduce coyote numbers to a level sustainable by the natural environment.

NBCS is a collaborative project committed to cutting edge research on coyote populations in Rhode Island and sharing its findings and recommendations with local communities. Study details can be found at www.theconservationagency.org/coyote.

For information on coyotes, public and pet safety, and how to report sightings, you can visit *CoyoteSmarts* at www.coyotesmarts.org. For rules and regulations, pertaining to coyotes in Rhode Island visit www.dem.ri.gov.



Potter League
Enriching Lives



Aquidneck
Land Trust



The
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R H O D E I S L A N D
N A T U R A L H I S T O R Y S U R V E Y
Providing Ecosystem Science and Information



Aquidneck Island
PLANNING COMMISSION

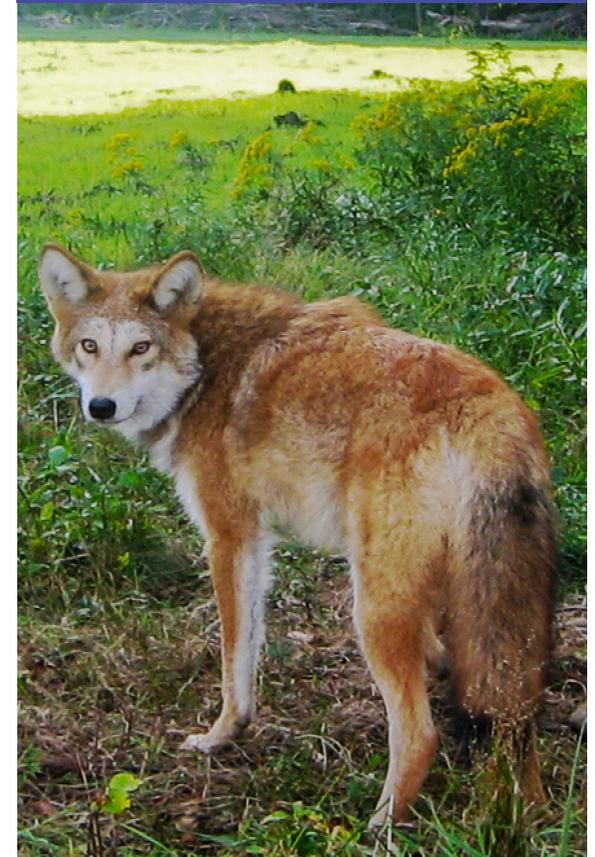


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Living Safely with Coyotes



Prepared by
The Narragansett Bay Coyote Study
for



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