

THE ARGUMENT

Does Massachusetts have a coyote problem?

Read two views and vote in our online poll.

By **John Laidler** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 12, 2022, 4:12 p.m.



YES

Pauline Marino

Revere resident



Pauline Marino

I have always loved animals and enjoy living in proximity to wildlife, from rabbits to squirrels and even skunks and raccoons. For urban dwellers, it is an enjoyable way to feel connected with nature.

But when the presence of wildlife poses a threat to your safety and peace of mind, it becomes a problem. And that's what has happened in my Revere neighborhood because of its large and active coyote population .

I first saw a coyote on my street about 2014. Over time they grew into a pack. Living in dens in an adjacent hilly, wooded area, they started coming down nights — and increasingly during daylight hours — wandering into our streets and yards. We became used to the screeching sounds of their prey when captured, resembling the screams of a baby.

What has been the impact?

Many of us have had to invest in fences to keep coyotes from our backyards. Fearing coyote encounters, a girl from a neighboring family needs her father to ride alongside her when she bikes along our street, and a 97-year-old neighbor will no longer sit in her backyard. I used to walk my dog in the early morning before work but now drive her to a doggy park. Other wildlife, notably rabbits, have all but vanished from our neighborhood. And we all fear for our pets. I believe the same situation prevails in many other Massachusetts neighborhoods.

MassWildlife tells us coyotes are not typically aggressive. But what do you do when you are greeted by four or five coyotes in your driveway when you get home from work? Is that not aggressive?

In our neighborhood, we have tried to be proactive — building our fences and using rigid coyote-proof trash containers. That has helped, but the coyotes have not gone away.

I do not want to see harm come to coyotes, and I feel badly for them. With all our development, we are shrinking their natural habitat. But our present relationship with them is not safe. In Arlington last year, three children were attacked by coyotes in separate incidents. Let's not wait for other such attacks to take action. I don't claim to have the solution but the present situation is not good for people or coyotes.

NO

Elizabeth Magner

Animal advocacy specialist, Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; Dedham resident



Elizabeth Magner

Over the past few years, many Greater Boston residents have delighted at the sight of coyotes lounging in suburban backyards or trotting down city streets. Other citizens, however, have been alarmed and wonder if coyote numbers should be lowered. Yet it is neither necessary nor possible to reduce the coyote population, or to even view it as a problem. Instead, simple adjustments to our behaviors can drastically reduce human-coyote interactions, while allowing us to still benefit from the important role these animals play in our ecosystem.

MassWildlife experts have made clear that it is simply not possible to control the coyote population. In fact, research has shown that when culled, coyotes can increase their reproductive rate and quickly bounce back—even when as many as 70 percent are removed. Additionally, because coyotes can maintain territories of up to 30 square miles, what may appear to be a large number in a given area may in fact be only a few individuals. The best option — and the only option — is for us to learn to coexist with coyotes peacefully and humanely.

We can all take simple measures to help ensure that coyotes do not become habituated to people, which will help prevent human-coyote interactions. It is rare for a coyote to bite a human, but when it does happen, it is typically because the animal has become accustomed to human-provided food.

It's crucial to never feed coyotes, and to remove or secure other potential attractants on your property, such as pet food or trash. If you do see a coyote, "haze" the animal: Make a lot of noise (shout or bang pots and pans) and appear as large and aggressive as possible (stand tall and wave your arms). Coyotes are smart and adaptable — they learn quickly whether they should avoid people or whether their presence means that food is nearby.

Coyotes are often called a keystone species, which means their presence has a significant and positive impact on the natural environment. For instance, coyotes help to control small mammal populations, including rodents. They also help maintain species diversity and the overall health of Massachusetts ecosystems.

We should embrace coyotes as our wild neighbors, and engage in proven strategies to reduce human-coyote interactions.

As told to Globe correspondent John Laidler. To suggest a topic, please contact laidler@globe.com.