

Living with Coyotes

BY MARLI RABINOWITZ

On January 7, the Guilford Conservation Commission sponsored an evening talk about coyotes. A resident had contacted us, upset about losing a cat. Kim Royar, a biologist from Vermont Fish and Wildlife, came with a slideshow, pelts, and a lot of good information. As the forest has regrown in Vermont, forest animals have returned and increased, and living with them can be a challenge. The



A coyote moves quickly along a stone wall

wolves and mountain lions that roamed here once were wiped out by Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries. But then, as Europeans moved westward and cut down trees and made fields, the Western coyote was able to move in the reverse direction, east of the Mississippi, as it was a creature of the open plains. Along the way, it interbred with the northern red wolf, and the Eastern coyote is about 25% wolf. Thus, coyotes in Vermont are larger than the 40 lb. desert coyote, and their skulls and jaws are also larger. Breeding with dogs happens, but the young are not successful.

These “coywolves” reached Vermont in the 1940s and have established populations all around the state, 4-8 per square mile; an estimated seven or eight thousand are now in Vermont. They live

in family groups, and it is true that they breed faster when the population density is less. Even though the cubs have a 50% mortality rate, trying to “hunt them out” is not successful in the long term. Coyotes eat carrion, small mammals such as mice and woodchucks, fawns, deer, berries, and other plant material. While coyotes do eat deer, they have more effect on the populations of smaller predators such as fox and bobcat, by taking their prey. It is true that they will eat pets that are outside unprotected, especially at night. Owls, fisher cats, bobcats, and other predators will also eat pets. It is wise to keep pets and livestock in at night and fenced or leashed during the day. (I have heard that mules and llamas are protective.) We only touched on issues of hunting and trapping; there is a range of opinions about whether that is effective and

bear nor coyote are easy to control, and frankly Kim said the department’s resources are oriented towards protection of species that are rare or endangered. Coyotes are a predator to be respected, also beautiful to watch (and be watched by!) and to photograph. They are now a part of our ecosystem, and it is wise to learn to protect yourself and your children and pets when outdoors, whether from ticks or mammals.

The more you learn about coyotes, the easier it will be to live with them. How you do that is up to you. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife department offers further information at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/learn-more/vermont-critters/mammals/coyote>. Coyotes might enrich rather than diminish your enjoyment of outdoor life.

even more opinions about the ethics. Coyote hunting is legal all year round and there is a market for their winter fur.

On March 14, the Dummerston Conservation Commission sponsored a talk on living with bears. I was not able to attend, but it is clear that forest predators are here to stay, and some of our habits will need to change. Neither

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