



Coyotes: Coexistence and Risk Management



Coyotes can be found in every city and town in Massachusetts. They have increasingly been observed throughout urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Although coyotes are inclined to avoid humans, they are attracted to these areas because they find readily available food, shelter, and other coyotes. Adult coyotes are comparable to a medium size dog, usually weighing about 35 pounds and standing two feet tall.

Coyote sightings may cause folks to worry about their safety and about the perceived risks to their children and pets. News reports tend to sensationalize coyote encounters and suggest that these animals are aggressive. The coyotes on and around Harvard University campuses, however, have appeared healthy and have exhibited normal and non-aggressive behaviors.

Coyotes are particularly attracted to and feast upon food waste they find in unsecured trash and compost. They can and do capture and eat mice, rats, squirrels, rabbits, small birds, and even the occasional goose.

Because coyotes may view any small animal as a potential meal, pet owners should always have their dogs on leashes and close at hand. Parents and childcare center personnel are similarly advised to be mindful of wandering or unattended children.

Harvard has not yet experienced an incident of concern on campus, and does not expect any, but a little extra vigilance is wise.

Coyotes cannot legally be hunted, killed, trapped, or transported unless they have posed a threat to persons. Simply being in the area would not qualify as a threat.



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The loss of a pet to a coyote is devastating to a family and can be prevented by ensuring pets are always under the watchful eyes and control of their owners.

Despite infrequent contact with humans, coyotes serve an important role in the ecosystem. Coyotes provide a service by keeping other pests in check. We encourage you to embrace coyotes (but at a distance) and not to fear or be overly discouraging of them.

While admiring coyotes, please abide by the following guidance:

- Do not approach, feed, or try to pet (or take 'selfies' with) coyotes.

Doing so is not good for coyotes and could result in a bad outcome. Most of the recent news reports of coyote problems are associated with coyotes that were habituated by being fed by or were cornered by persons. This is a people problem, not a coyote problem.

- Keep food and food wastes secure. Dispose of food and beverage containers responsibly. Place containers in secure waste receptacles and close the lids.
- Refrain from propping open exterior doors. There is no need to offer an added incentive for wildlife to come inside.
- Report any incidents to [Environmental Health and Safety \(EH&S\)](#) or the [Harvard University Operations Center](#). EH&S will coordinate with wildlife officials if needed.
- If you are approached by a coyote, simply face the animal, but **do not turn or run**.

Raise your arms and yell at the animal. If handy, an umbrella or flashlight can be used to make yourself appear larger and more frightening. Usually, the coyote will turn and wander off.

Do not strike coyotes with any objects. If necessary, items can be flung in the coyote's general direction but do not target the animals themselves. Where a hose is available, a stream of water directed near or at the coyotes can often convince them to move away.



- In the unlikely event of a bite or scratch from a coyote, the injured person should be evaluated by medical personnel to treat any wound and to consider whether a rabies postexposure treatment is justified.
Contact the Operations Center and have them contact EH&S directly.

Additional Resources

Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife

- [Learn About Coyotes](#)
- [Living with Wildlife: Eastern Coyotes in Massachusetts](#)
- [Prevent Conflicts with Coyotes](#)
- [Understanding Coyotes: Advice for Parents, School Officials, and Child Care Providers](#)

City of Cambridge

- [Tips for Preventing Conflicts with Coyotes](#)

City of Boston

- [Wildlife Problems and Solutions](#)