



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

# Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

February 2, 2007  
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## *MassWildlife Advisory*

### Coyotes Incidents in Massachusetts

This past week, the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) received a number of calls from concerned citizens, municipal officials and the media regarding an incident over the past weekend involving a coyote attack on a small dog and subsequent shooting of coyotes by local officials in Framingham. Inquiries included concerns regarding the coyotes involved in the incident and the actions of the municipal officials. A number of questions about coyote behavior, pet and child safety and relevant laws about coyotes have also been fielded by MassWildlife biologists. As the state agency responsible for wildlife in Massachusetts, MassWildlife has been working with local officials on this incident and providing information to the public regarding coyote behavior.

On Saturday, January 27, 2007, Framingham officials received a report of coyotes attacking a small dog in a back yard within view of the pet's owners. In the interest of public safety and based on the nature of the attack, the behavior of the coyotes after the attack, and the condition of the coyotes, the Framingham police and Animal Control Officers (ACOs) lethally removed four coyotes from the area of the attack on January 28. Framingham officials notified MassWildlife about the incident on Monday, January 29.

Framingham officials also provided three coyote carcasses to MassWildlife for biological examination on Wednesday, January 31. A fourth carcass was not examined as it had been immediately buried due to the animal's severe mange condition. After examining the carcasses and consulting with Framingham ACOs, MassWildlife biologists concluded that the overall health and condition of the coyotes was very poor due to mange.

**Coyote Natural History** -- First appearing in the state in the 1950's, coyotes are now found in every town in the Commonwealth except for the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. They are highly adaptable to a variety of habitats, including urban, suburban and rural areas, from the Berkshires to Boston. Coyotes consume a variety of foods ranging from vegetable matter, trash, bird seed, small mammals and carrion (dead animals). A family group of coyotes generally consists of two dominant adults, subordinate adults, and juveniles. Territories can range from 2-30 square miles, depending on the abundance of food. Coyotes defend territory through howling, scent marking, body displays, and confrontation with trespassing coyotes. There are also transient coyotes consisting of dispersing juveniles and unmated adults. Transients travel on the outskirts of a family group's territory. Breeding occurs in January through March and litters with an average of 5-6 pups are born April through May.

**Coyotes and People** -- Coyotes are typically fearful of people, but they can become habituated (accustomed) to humans if they have easy access to trash, compost, pet food, and other human-influenced foods and do not sense that people will bother them. There have been three confirmed coyote attacks in Massachusetts since the 1950's. Two of the animals were rabid, the third was habituated to people. MassWildlife encourages homeowners and business to not only keep their yards, buildings and

neighborhoods clean of potential food sources, but to also actively scare and intimidate coyotes in order to preserve the coyotes natural fear of people.

**Coyotes and Pets** -- Because the coyote's natural diet includes small animals, there is a risk of predation on small dogs and cats. When unleashed and unsupervised dogs and cats are outdoors, either in a backyard or during a walk, they become part of the environment. Coyotes may view small dogs as prey. When confrontations between coyotes and mid- and large-sized dogs occur, it is often the coyote exhibiting territorial defense behavior. Coyotes are most likely to display this behavior during the mating and pup birthing period from January through June. To reduce conflicts between pets and coyotes, MassWildlife encourages pet owners to restrain their pets, either by using a leash during walks or by keeping pets in a fenced-in area. By restraining dogs, they can be easily supervised, while also providing a human presence that dissuades coyotes from approaching. Keeping cats indoors not only avoids attacks by coyotes, but also prevents against other hazards such as predation by other wild animals and domestic pets, poison, diseases, automobiles, and people. Restrained pets also benefit wildlife such as small mammals and songbirds which are hunted or harassed by loose pets.

**Coyotes and the Law** -- Coyotes, like other wildlife in the state, are protected by a variety of laws. Licensed hunters may hunt coyotes only during the coyote season, which begins in November and ends in February. All hunting and relevant firearms regulations and local bylaws must be followed. There is also a one month trapping season in November allowing licensed fur trappers to trap coyotes in box traps. Farmers and other property owners are allowed by law to destroy coyotes or other wildlife causing damage to their crops or property. Pet owners may also take lethal action against coyotes that are attacking pets on their property. Coyotes deemed by public safety officials to pose an imminent threat to the health and safety of people may also be destroyed. Threats to safety can include, but is not limited to, situations where a coyote is ill, severely injured or attacking people. Attacks on unsupervised pets are considered to be normal hunting behavior. It is important to note that the presence of coyotes in a yard, on a road or near a school does not in of itself constitute a threat to public safety. A fact sheet on coyotes and tips on how to avoid conflicts may be found on the MassWildlife website at [www.mass.gov/masswildlife](http://www.mass.gov/masswildlife).

**Report Aggressive Coyotes** -- Anyone observing an aggressive coyote is urged to report this behavior to MassWildlife and local officials. Aggressive behaviors to report include: attacks on leashed pets, attacks on unleashed pets in very close proximity to their owners, coyotes failing to run off when harassed or chased by people and coyotes approaching people. Reporting these incidents allow biologists to assess the situation and advise homeowners or local officials about possible options for action.

MassWildlife investigates wildlife attacks on people. Biologists determine the nature of the attack, identify the likely animal involved and provide suggestions and support on appropriate actions. For example, a recent reported attack on a person by animals near trash barrels in Melrose was investigated by the agency. MassWildlife biologists interviewed the victim, examined the victim's injuries and gathered other information. Based on the evidence, MassWildlife biologists concluded that the animals involved in the attack may have been raccoons or small dogs, not coyotes as initially reported. In this cas, biologists recommended securing the barrels from animal access. The agency conclusions were also provided to local health and public safety officials and to media outlets reporting on the incident in order to clarify the nature of the incident and to educate the public on suggested actions to reduce potential conflicts with wildlife.

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[www.mass.gov/masswildlife](http://www.mass.gov/masswildlife)

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