

Acton WildAware Beacon Article  
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### --Have a Healthy Respect for Coyotes and Foxes

Both Coyotes and Red Foxes have ranges around Acton. Though they each generally encounters with humans, intentional or unintentional feeding and the presence of outdoor pets and small livestock may lure them and cause problems. Foxes are usually shy and wary, but they are also curious. Coyotes also avoid humans but when seen, their larger size and resemblance to wolves can be intimidating. A benefit to co-existing with coyotes and foxes is that their diet includes rodents. Please avoid mouse poisons.

There has been interest in the role red foxes and coyotes play in the spread and persistence of Lyme disease. In 2014, when ecologist Taal Levi was at the University of California-Santa Cruz, his doctoral research found that increases in Lyme disease in the Northeast and Midwest in the past three decades consistently correlated to range-wide declines in red fox, which (among other foods) feed primarily on small rodents. The spread of coyote range and its prey preferences for animals larger than small rodents, including rabbits and other medium sized prey, allows the *growth* of small rodent populations. When Red Fox find abundant prey, they hunt continuously and cache it away, further reducing the small rodent population. In this study, the Red Fox eating habits suggest that they are very helpful in reducing probable Lyme disease host rodents including mice, shrews and chipmunks.

Fox dens have entrance holes that lead to an enclosed area and a tunnel and often more tunnels. In the spring, fox mates dig the den together. The female fox brings grass and leaves into the den and after giving birth to several kits, stays inside the den for two weeks, relying on the male to bring her food. When the kits are about 5 weeks old they begin playing outside around the den entrance. Gradually the fox parents bring them meat, then live mice so that they can practice hunting. By fall the kits will be hunting on their own. Mass Audubon offers that a fox den in the backyard presents little danger to the homeowners: foxes would rather avoid people than confront them. Watching the young as they develop the skills they will need as an adult can be a joy to both adults and children.

Like red foxes, coyote parents feed and protect their young. They may create a den by building a burrow or use one left behind by another animal. For their first few weeks of life, coyote pups are unable to see or hear. After the pups are weaned, its parents swallow food to bring back to the pups and regurgitate it. Coyote parents teach the pups to hunt by leading them on hunts where they will only watch, and they are able to hunt on their own by summertime. The coyote lifespan is about 6-8 years. Coyotes are hardy and adaptable to rural, suburban and urban settings where they protect a larger range than Red Foxes. Socially, coyotes may live alone, or stay with a lifelong mate or are a member of a pack community.

Be WildAware! Mind pets outside, especially small ones, and feed pets indoors. Keep coyotes feeling fearful of humans and urging them to move out of an area such as your backyard, or wherever people are gathered. Never run from a coyote! At home, effective hazing methods include: yelling, blowing whistles, blasting air horns, shaking a can full of marbles or pennies, and banging metal pans together. Similar tactics can be used while walking your dog. If the coyote leaves but is still in sight, even stopping to look at you, keep up the hazing until he leaves the area entirely. It is important to be consistent, because if the coyote returns you must continue to harass it as you did before. It may take more loud noisy attempts to keep coyotes from returning. If you absolutely must eject foxes from an area, it's best to wait until any young are old enough to follow the parents. Mild harassment such as loud noises (yelling, banging pots) can work.

Resources:

Colorado Public

Radio: <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/coyote-conflicts-have-increased-denver-researchers-want-know-why>

Mass

Wildlife: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/dfw/wildlife/wildlife-living/living-with-foxes.pdf>

National Geographic: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/coyote/>

Living with

Coyotes: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/dfw/wildlife/wildlife-living/living-with-coyotes.pdf>

Cary

Institute: <http://www.caryinstitute.org/newsroom/study-questions-link-between-increases-lyme-disease-and-deer> Study questions link between increases in Lyme disease and deer, January 14, 2014 from Madison.com, by Patrick Durkin for the State Journal, January 11, 2014

*Paula Goodwin is a member of the Acton Conservation Commission who introduced WildAware with Acton Natural Resource Assistant Bettina Abe. WildAware is a program sponsored by the Town of Acton Natural Resources Department that began in September and will continue through the summer of 2016. The purpose of WildAware is to educate the community about the existence and habits of wild creatures, and the goal is increased community awareness of shared habitats. For information, call 978-929-6634 or send email to [nr@acton-ma.gov](mailto:nr@acton-ma.gov).*