

Watch your pets - It's Coyote mating season

By Paula Jones (Bloomfield Messenger 2/23/2024 edition)

Have you heard coyotes howling lately? January through March is mating season in Connecticut, and these canines are reestablishing their territories and looking for their mates. Coyotes are monogamous, usually maintaining their pair bond for several years. Pups are born in April to mid-May and the average litter size in Connecticut is seven pups. Father coyotes will bring food home to the mothers while the pups are nursing. The pups are weaned at 6 to 8 weeks of age and will start hunting and foraging with their parents when they're 8 to 13 weeks old. The family group will break up in the fall or winter when the young disperse to establish their own territories.

Coyotes are good parents with both adults caring for the young. As good parents, coyotes are very protective of their pups which can lead to conflicts with people and pets. Generally the risk of a coyote attacking a person is low. However, coyotes will be more aggressive near a den or territory during denning and pup rearing periods. Since dogs are seen as threats to pups, adults will defend against resident dogs while also exhibiting increasingly bold behavior around people. Cats (and small dogs) are seen as prey, so keeping small pets indoors is the best way to protect them.

The Connecticut DEEP website has a helpful list of tips to prevent conflicts with coyotes (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Nuisance-Wildlife/Living-with-Coyotes>). Here is an excerpt from that list:

- (1) "DO NOT allow pets to run free! Keep cats indoors, particularly at night, and dogs on a leash or under close supervision at all times."
- (2) "NEVER feed coyotes! DO NOT place food out for any mammals. Clean up bird seed below feeders, pet foods, and fallen fruit. Secure garbage and compost in animal-proof containers."
- (3) "ALWAYS walk dogs on a leash. If approached by a coyote while walking your dog, keep the dog under control and calmly leave the area. DO NOT run or turn your back."
- (4) "Prevent coyotes from denning in close proximity to homes and yards with pets and children. Identify potential den sites in March when snow tracking can easily reveal natural dug burrows, rock crevices, hollow tree trunk cavities, and crawl spaces under sheds or even decks ... Such dens should be inspected and any occupants evicted prior to denning in April. Unoccupied dens should be filled in and or collapsed and those suspected under buildings, porches, and sheds excluded by animal proofing with sturdy hardware cloth."
- (5) "Educate your neighbors. Ask them to follow these same steps."

Coyotes are shy animals that generally try to avoid people. They provide a valuable ecological service by helping keep the populations of other wild species (mice, squirrels, rabbits, turkeys, deer) under control. Follow these tips to avoid conflicts with your wild neighbors and to keep you and your pets safe.



Eastern Coyote in northern Bloomfield

