

# Eastern Coyote Issues - A Closer Look



## Background and History

The eastern coyote is one of Vermont's many predators. Although it has not been a resident as long as some of our native predators such as bobcat, fisher, or foxes, the adaptable and wily coyote is here to stay and to partially fill the niche left by wolves. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department believes that both predators and prey species are vital components in a healthy ecosystem. Deer and other prey species evolved with predators and as such, we neither regard predators as undesirable, nor do we view them as a significant threat to game populations. In fact, predators can help to maintain prey populations at levels that are in balance with their habitat.

Coyotes were not believed to have been found in Vermont prior to the 1940s. As wolves were eliminated in New England, the more adaptable coyote moved in from the western prairies. Vermont's coyote population has bred heavily with wolves in Canada, making them larger and more social than their western counterparts. The population is estimated to be between 6,000-9,000 individuals and is unlikely to increase significantly beyond its current level. We do not believe that the current hunting and trapping seasons impact the population in the long-term, as coyote numbers are much more limited by prey availability than by pressure from hunting or trapping.

Public attitudes towards coyotes are becoming increasingly positive, although rural residents tend to be less accommodating to coyotes because of direct experience with depredation on domestic livestock or deer. The Fish & Wildlife Department has worked hard to dispel the myths surrounding coyotes and to work with the public to address their concerns about them.

## Coyote Control and Hunting Contests

In recent years, competitive coyote hunting contests have been held by hunters. The Department does not sponsor, promote, or encourage coyote hunting tournaments. Although these activities follow Vermont



laws and regulations, we do not believe such short-term hunts will have any measurable impact on regulating coyote populations, nor will they bolster populations of deer or other game species.

Attempts to eradicate or control coyote numbers in western states have been extremely costly and have met with failure. Such efforts now are generally focused on eliminating individual coyotes that are causing livestock losses. Where significant reductions in coyote numbers are locally achieved, the missing animals are soon replaced with young coyotes moving in from other locations, so any local population reduction is only short-term. Coyotes can increase their reproductive rates in response to hunting, so populations rebound quickly from efforts to control their numbers directly by hunting or trapping.

Coyote hunting contests are not only ineffective at controlling coyote populations, but these kinds of competitive coyote hunts are raising concerns on the part of the public and could possibly jeopardize the future of hunting and affect access to private lands for all hunters.

## Coyotes and Humans

The hunting and trapping of coyotes does play a role in keeping this very adaptable animal wild. In areas of the country without hunting or trapping, coyotes can become habituated to humans, especially if they

are fed. In these areas, negative interactions between humans and coyotes increase with little recourse for resolving the problem. There were 142 reported attacks from coyotes in the U.S. between 1960 and 2006, and conflicts have been on the rise, particularly in urban and suburban areas. Hunting and trapping has likely helped minimize negative interactions between coyotes and people in Vermont.

## Coyotes and Deer

We offer the following statements regarding coyotes and their interaction with deer:

- ❖ Coyotes capitalize on a variety of prey species including deer. Many studies have documented that coyotes, black bears and bobcats all kill fawns in the spring. However, researchers have concluded there is no evidence suggesting fawn survival rates are preventing deer population growth. Coyotes also kill some deer in the winter, but again, not to an extent that prevents deer population growth.
- ❖ Coyotes are also scavengers on carcasses of deer that may die of malnutrition or other causes. Just because a coyote is feeding on a deer does not mean the coyotes killed that deer.
- ❖ Even the complete removal of coyotes from Vermont would not ensure a healthy, abundant deer herd. Winter deer habitat is the “critical” factor that limits and controls total deer numbers in the long term.
- ❖ We are not aware of any scientific evidence from studies done in the Northeast, indicating that coyotes either control or limit the numbers of deer in healthy deer populations, particularly if coyote predation is taken into consideration when determining antlerless harvest rates. There are numerous scientific studies that suggest that coyotes do not regulate deer populations.
- ❖ Vermont’s deer herd is healthy. In Vermont, winter severity is perhaps the most significant factor driving deer population fluctuations from year to year. Populations of all wild animals naturally fluctuate.
- ❖ Coyotes are territorial animals and defend their territories aggressively. This limits the maximum

number of territories that can exist in Vermont, and limits the maximum number of coyotes that can be sustained in the state.

For deer hunters with questions about coyotes, we recommend Ben Koerth’s article [“Are predators hurting your whitetail herd?”](#)

[Read more on life history, management and status of the Eastern Coyote in Vermont.](#)

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