

Coyotes on Open Space Trails

Visitors to open spaces will not be surprised to learn that one or more sightings of coyotes are reported each year. Knowing when you are most likely to come in contact with them and understanding how to respond is important.

First reported in Connecticut in the mid-1950s, the coyote is not native to New England. The eastern coyote tends to be larger than its western brethren, which grew in size as it migrated east over the last 100 years through the upper plains states and Canada by interbreeding with gray wolves. They are adapting efficiently to semi-rural and even suburban areas where rodents, domestic cats and other animals are a permanent food source.

Coyotes are shy but territorial, especially in springtime when pups are born, April to mid-May, according to the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Wildlife Division. Contrary to a common view, coyotes do not travel in packs; rather the "social unit consists of the adult pair and their young" until the pups go off on their own, according to the DEEP. The story of coyotes in New England is interesting and can be helpful should one encounter a simply inquisitive or aggressive animal. Details are available on the Connecticut DEEP's website, www.ct.gov/deep.

There seems to be no simple remedy to scaring off a coyote in the very rare instance if one is encountered by a walker/hiker. They are especially territorial in pup-rearing season in spring, and while they are night owls, they can be seen in daylight hours. Recent experience in this area suggests that because of coyotes' territoriality, dog walkers, vs. dog-less hikers, in open spaces are more likely to encounter a coyote. While encounters with hikers are very rare, and coyotes pose no threat to humans, the DEP suggests "Attempt to frighten away coyotes by making loud noises (e.g., shouting, air horn) and acting aggressively (e.g., waving your arms, throwing sticks . . .)." Open space hikers in spring/early summer might be best advised to leave leashed Fido at home.

*Bruce Beebe
Weir Preserve Stewardship Committee*

Weir Preserve is owned by the Weir Farm Art Center and maintained by the Weir Preserve Stewardship Committee. The preserve consists of 110 acres of land including trails, wetlands, open fields and stone walls contiguous to Weir Farm National Historic Site. This article was originally written for the Weir Farm Preserve newsletter.