



Hi Ed & Nancy,

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Rules Changes at Wiley Park Considered

EDOA board members are in touch with the Conservation Committee and Open Space Committee regarding problems they perceive due to dogs.

We would like to see rules remain as they have been since the park was opened for recreation and conservation. While use of the facility has seen wear and tear from recreational use, there are options to rules changes that will allow the shared use by people and pets that maintain the natural surroundings we all enjoy and respect.

We hope to convince the Cons Com and Open Space Cmte that changes that ban traditional use is not the only or best course of action.

We will keep you informed on how our conversations go.

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Repair Approved by Conservation Committee

EDOA requested permission from the Cons Com to repair holes at Wiley Park. The holes were apparently made by exuberant dogs that were not monitored closely enough to stop the damage to the trailside. This is a bad reflection on us, and we wanted Cons Com to know that we want to make it right.

The repair was approved at the Cons Com meeting February 28th unanimously. We will be heading down with Keith Johnson of Natural Resources to take care of it.

EDOA Education Series

Special Time for Coyotes

• Ed Daniels

February and March are a special time for coyotes and that warrants some special attention from dog owners. This is breeding season for Cape Cod's second largest canine population. Their behavior changes and so might yours. But before getting into that, we need to take a deep breath.

Lessons for me come from encounters with other big-toothed animals. When SCUBA diving we regularly came upon sharks. When prepping for a dive, the divemaster was asked what we should do in such a circumstance. She rather smugly replied, "Enjoy the view". At a different time and place National Park rangers were being peppered with questions about the recent visits from grizzly bears and what to do. Coincidentally, he replied, "Enjoy the view".

Those were obviously attempts to defuse the angst being expressed about the presence of these iconic and very big predators. To their credit, these experts explained that we needed to know the animal, what the triggers aggressive behavior, the signs, and how to respond. Not panic, but preparation—then enjoy an awesome and rare sighting.

So should it be with coyotes. More accurately referred to as coywolves, our wild dogs are a hybrid of eastern coyotes and red wolves. The exact species of the "Adam and Eve" are still debated. This hybrid is a bit taller than the eastern coyote but is not nearly as tall or heavy as a red wolf. Our coywolves top off at about 35 to 45 pounds (rarely higher) according to local expert Peter Trull.

Our coyotes are very family invested, cautious and clever. Aggression generally revolves around their family. They may move forward to push intruders away from their den. They do not lure dogs to be attacked by the pack. They lure dogs away from the coyote family. They do not run in packs as coyotes are solitary hunters. Several together are in the family or out looking to create one.

Coyotes do not want contact with a person or a large dog. They do not have access to Fontaine Medical Center and any injury is likely to be fatal to them. Your confident, aggressive posture or action is generally enough to ward off an animal that has become habituated or worse fed by humans.

So, why all the first person reports of coyotes aggressively approaching dogs and even people? The answer is in us. Think about the response you might have if your family was being attacked or starving? We can understand someone taking the chance of getting caught to steal bread for a starving family. That was the whole premise for Les Misérables. Then there are the videos of human mothers, grappling with wolves, snakes, even bears to protect their young ones. Guess we are not so different from the coyotes.

OK, we might understand the behaviors that seem a threat to us, but we still do not want to be bitten, or

have our dog to be carried off as food. What to do? The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and local expert Peter Tuell give the same advice.

- Keep small dogs close to you, even in fenced yards. They can be seen as prey.
- Control dogs from chasing coyotes. While unlikely to attack a dog over 40 lbs, a chasing dog will be seen as an existential threat. Remember the protective mother?
- Make noise and make unwelcome any coyotes appearing near you. They are naturally suspicious and wary and feigned aggression by humans is an effective deterrent.
- Never feed coyotes. That includes leaving out pet food, compost, or bird food where they can get at it. They will eat rats and other rodents drawn in by these other "foods". They will eat cats.
- Diligence is particularly important during the mating and pup-rearing season, February through May.

Tuell further advises that we learn to live with the wild animals in our environment rather than fear them. "Let's learn to understand them. People want to be a part of nature, but it's hard to be a part of nature when you despise something that is a widespread part of nature," he said.

Here are some other interesting things about our coyotes.

- Coyotes first appeared on the Cape in 1988.
- Coyotes are in every county in Massachusetts.
- The largest rash of coyotes attacking small dogs was in one small area of Eastham in the 1990s. In almost all cases, the dogs had chased the coyotes. Just one rouge coyote which was fed by neighbors was suspected.
- Thankfully, rabies on the Outer Cape is currently controlled.
- Coyotes can help control populations of rodents, rabbits and Canada geese.
- The number of reported bites on humans by coyotes: 1
- The number of coyotes killed by legal hunting in Massachusetts annually: ~ 500. In South Carolina: 35,000. The coyote population remains about the same. Experts agree that shooting coyotes will have negligible effect on the population.

The point is that coyotes are wild animals, and they are not going away. Respect for their ways will prevent negative encounters. Respect includes vigilance as any wild animal can be unpredictable.

Stay safe and enjoy the view.

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Editor: Ed.Daniels@easthamdog.org



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