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DEM REMINDS PUBLIC TO AVOID INTERACTIONS WITH COYOTES BY ELIMINATING FOOD SOURCES FROM THEIR PROPERTY

PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is advising residents that this is the time of year when coyotes may often be seen in populated areas and suburban neighborhoods in search of food. DEM advises the public not to feed or have food sources available that can be easily accessed by coyotes or other wildlife. Coyotes that find abundant and easily obtained food resources around neighborhoods may become bold and habituated to human activity, creating situations that are detrimental to the animal and can also put small pets at risk. Coyote attacks on humans are a rare occurrence, but any coyote that exhibits bold or aggressive behavior to humans should be treated with caution and reported to authorities.

Coyotes are opportunistic in their dietary habits, eating whatever is most abundant and easily obtainable at a given time. Their natural diet typically consists of prey such as small mammals, as well as wild and domestic fruits and berries, when available. Their diet largely consists of carrion – the carcasses of animals that have died naturally or by other causes such as auto strikes. Because coyotes do not make a distinction between wildlife and domestic animals such as house cats and small dogs, pet owners are advised to avoid keeping cats and small dogs outdoors and unattended, particularly at night, to protect them from encounters with coyotes or other wildlife.

DEM also reminds the public to:

• Keep bird feeders out of reach of wild animals. With warmer weather finally approaching, natural food sources for birds are more plentiful now.
• Do not feed pets outside, or, if you do, take pet food dishes inside at night.

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• Store garbage in sheds and garages, away from doors. Double bagging and the use of ammonia will reduce odors that attract wildlife.
• Put garbage for pickup outside the morning of collection, not the night before.
• Keep barbecue grills clean of grease.
• Do not put meat or sweet food scraps in your compost pile.
• Enjoy wildlife from a distance.

Coyotes in suburban areas may, because of their constant exposure to the sights and sounds of human activity, become casual or even bold in their behavior – but not necessarily aggressive toward people – and lose their fear of humans. Despite this, most coyotes usually make every attempt to avoid interactions with people. Coyote attacks on people are very rare. A 2009 study found that 159 people were bitten by coyotes in all of North America between 1960 and 2006. On the other hand, more than 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year in the United States, over half of dog bite injuries occur at home with dogs that are familiar to us, and over 800,000 receive medical attention for dog bites, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Coyotes can often be discouraged simply by making yourself visible, and letting them know, either by voice or other loud noises that they are not welcome. An assertive posture and making eye contact will convey a message of authority that coyotes will typically respect. Should a coyote exhibit aggressive, bold, or even curious behavior, in most cases it is best to stand your ground and not run away. Animals that appear or act aggressively or are noticeably sick should be reported to the DEM Division of Law Enforcement (222-3070) or to your local animal control officer.

Adult coyotes weigh approximately 40 pounds. The first appearance of coyotes in Rhode Island occurred in the mid-1960s, part of a range expansion into the eastern United States that began at the end of the 19th century. Coyotes can currently be found in all Rhode Island communities except New Shoreham. They may hunt and travel alone or sometimes will travel as a group, usually an adult pair with their offspring from the previous year. In our area, coyotes are mostly nocturnal, mainly to avoid interactions with people. Coyote pairs are territorial, and will exclude other coyotes from their established territory. Coyotes breed during late winter. Pups are born usually in April, 60-65 days after breeding occurs. As pups grow and they begin the weaning process of eating solid foods, the adults must spend greater time foraging, sometimes during daylight hours.

For more information on coyotes visit DEM’s website at http://www.dem.ri.gov/. Follow DEM on Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM or on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) for timely updates.

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