

***City of Warwick Rhode Island
Coyote Commission
Final Report***

September 30, 2005

Executive Summary:

This report of the Warwick Coyote Commission, formed by Mayor Scott Avedisian on January 26, 2005, is based upon 8 months of data collection, interviews with experts in the field, and a series of public meetings to hear complaints and experiences of residents regarding their interaction with the Warwick coyote population. Initially, the great majority of sightings reported were from Warwick Neck, where the large open spaces of Rocky Point, Aldrich mansion, numerous undeveloped areas of fresh water wetlands, and two golf courses present ideal habitat for coyotes; however, as a result of press articles and public meetings, many more sightings have now been reported in adjoining areas such as Oakland Beach, Buttonwoods, City Park, Greenwood and others – a clear indication that the population either already existed in many areas, or was moving into other parts of the city.

Initially the Commission sought to find ways to count the number of animals by locating dens, trapping and placing transmitters on some animals to enable monitoring their locations during the day, or tracking them – however, based upon reports of experts (see below) this would be an extremely time consuming and expensive task, taking months or perhaps years and costing tax payers well over \$100,000.00. Furthermore the coyote is a self-regulating species, which, on the one hand, will not overpopulate the food supply, and on the other, if efforts are made to reduce the population by eradicating them, will only result in the entry into the vacated area by new groups from adjoining areas. DEM Biologists estimate that on average a coyote territory (approximately five square miles) will support a pack of from 4 to 6 animals, which vigorously defend their territory against other coyotes moving in. As a result of these findings, it was decided it would not be fiscally responsible or necessary at this time to try to count the coyote population in Warwick. However, coyotes being a statewide issue further research into coyote behavior and movement should be considered at a state level.

Not surprisingly, the Commission found that educating the public about the behavior and feeding patterns of the coyote is the most effective way of both controlling the population of animals and at the same time reducing the fears of people who suddenly are encountering coyotes on a more frequent basis. Well meaning people who place food out for coyotes on a regular basis, believing they are helping the animals survive, are in fact changing the feeding patterns of the animals, expanding the food supply, and resulting in an increase in the coyote sightings. Such feeding can also change the patterns of movement by the animals, increase their risk of road kills, reduce their natural fear of humans, and result in more frightening encounters by people and their pets, whom the coyotes see either as a food source, or as a competitor for the limited food supply.

Findings

Based upon the testimony by experts and the residents interviewed by the commission, the following observations and conclusions were reached:

- The Eastern coyote is a self-regulating species:
 - Average pack size is 4-6 animals;
 - Pups are born in the spring, and will stay with the pack for about 1 year, after which they will be driven out of the territory by the adults, becoming transients, seeking their own territory, sometimes traveling many miles before finding and defending their own territory;
 - When their numbers are reduced, females start breeding at a younger age and have larger litters; when the territory becomes overpopulated, the opposite occurs;
- Coyotes will feed on insects, berries, small mammals such as mice, rats, skunks, rabbits, squirrels, as well as domestic cats and small dogs. As long as there is an ample supply of these food sources, it has been suggested that the coyotes will continue to occupy this area regardless of our best efforts to remove them.
 - It was reported that in Texas, the government destroyed 2500 coyotes in 1998, 2800 in 2000, and 3300 in 2002, at a tremendous cost to taxpayers. In 2004, they report no significant drop in the population of coyotes.
- Typically they feed at night and are seldom seen. The coyote does not appear to be susceptible to rabies (as, for example raccoons are) and there have been very few cases of coyote rabies ever reported. A case of a person being bitten by a coyote occurred when the person was trying to feed the coyote by hand. Other cases of confrontations with coyotes occur when the person is trying to protect a pet from a coyote.
- Coyotes are of significant concern to humans (especially infants) and domestic pets. The coyote is the largest predator to occupy this area in some 200 years. Since the extinction of the grey wolf and the bobcat, from this area, the coyote has no natural predators and will most likely be with us for some time. This lack of danger reduces the coyote's fear and leads to more brazen confrontations between coyotes and humans, which can be frightening to people especially if a child, pet dog or cat is involved.
- Unsecured garbage cans can also become a food source for coyotes. The new system of collecting garbage in Warwick may be effective in eliminating this source.
 - Interestingly, the number of reported sightings in Warwick Neck, the first neighborhood to receive the new receptacles, has dropped significantly.

- Coyotes are very social animals. They mate for life and packs remain close-knit
- It has been suggested by trappers that trapping the animals may help coyotes become “wilder”, leading them to revert to their practice of hunting only at night and avoiding contact with humans. The potential risk of trapping other animals, domestic and wild can be controlled by the use of today's leg-hold traps which have been approved by RIDEM, and which can be adjusted for both the weight and size of the animal. Therefore only animals of similar weight and size would be at risk. This approach should be considered with caution. Further research is recommended by using a controlled experiment or by researching this approach to see if it has been used in other communities and what were the end results. This will help to determine the true effectiveness of this practice. This approach would not in anyway decrease the numbers of coyotes, as this report has previously stated. Trapping would have to be done year after year to have any long term effect, and if considered, should only be done by professional trappers licensed by D.E.M .

Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. Develop an on-going educational program for the citizens; utilize newspaper articles and reports, the City of Warwick website. Expand the current Coyote section by adding a “Frequently Asked Questions” section.
2. Utilize trained specialist to conduct classroom training for our children. Distribute information published by DEM, the Conservation Agency, and other knowledgeable sources in public places, City Hall, schools and churches to create a more informed public.
3. Bring in coyote experts to work with our Animal Control and Police Officers on Best Management Practices regarding coyotes.
4. Modify the current Police Department policy of only responding to citizen complaints about domestic pet problems, in order to improve police response to coyote complaints.
5. Train our Animal Control and Police Force on the best way to remove a problem animal. This does not mean a coyote walking through someone’s yard, but a coyote acting aggressively towards people without provocation.
6. Educate owners of domestic animals on how to best protect their pets. Educate people about the problems created by people feeding wildlife such as coyotes, turkeys, feral cats and other wild animals, through community meetings, informational material distribution, as indicated above.

7. Establish a permanent commission to follow the future impact of the coyote population in our city. Continue to follow the ongoing scientific research studies on controlling the population i.e. sterilization.

Sources of Information:

DEM Biologists Charlie Brown and Mike Lapisky
Dr. Jonathan Way Eastern Coyote Research Project. Based on Cape Cod
John Maguranis Animal Control Officer Belmont, Massachusetts
Coyote Web Page, Warwickri.com, reported sightings
Spencer Tripp Professional Trapper
Texas Sheep Herders Association
Lowell Miller U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Wildlife Research Center Ft. Collins,
Colorado

Submitted By:

The Warwick, R.I. Coyote Commission:

Chairman: Councilman John A. DelGiudice

Vice-Chairman: Robert McVay

Members: Senator William Walaska
Representative Peter Ginaitt
Sargeant Robert Palumbo, W.P.D.
Kim Casci, Defenders of Animals
Kate Stark, President, Warwick Neck Improvement
Association
Mike Lapisky, RI Department of Environmental Management
Joanne Cournoyer, Secretary (non-voting)

Councilman John A. DelGiudice .

Robert McVay .

Senator William Walaska .

Representative Peter Ginaitt .

Sergeant Robert Palumbo .

Kim Casci .

Kate Stark .

Michael Lipisky .

***City of Warwick
Coyote Commission
Report & Recommendations***

Councilman John A. DelGiudice Chairman

Robert McVay Vice-Chairman

September 30, 2005

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