

Students, citizens can learn coyote management practices

The Narragansett Bay Coyote Study (NBCS), a key project of The Conservation Agency, announced last week the release of its formal online education program.

As many as 30 Newport County and other Rhode Island schools and organizations will be participating this year, including both Jamestown schools.

Jim Kaczynski's seventh grade science classes will be focusing on the project, but other grades and after-school groups can participate as well.

The website also has an online journal "Coyote Bytes," that provides regional information about coyotes and the study's progress.

This is an exciting time of year for the NBCS. Researchers are currently capturing and collaring this year's group of Jamestown coyotes just in time for the start of the schools' participation. The group is currently tracking coyotes from nine different packs.

"We should see differences between this year's coyote movements and last," said Dr. Numi Mitchell, lead scientist for the NBCS, which is based in Jamestown.

"Numbers of coyotes have continued to increase in Jamestown and there is more activity downtown this year," she noted.

Coyotes on the island are very dependent on food subsidies from people. "Coyotes are sensitive to the amount of food resources available," said Mitchell, "and adjust their reproductive output ac-

ordingly: the more food the more puppies they have."

Conversely, she noted, "they also drop their numbers if they sense a ceiling in resource availability. It follows that if we curtail the food subsidization of coyotes, their populations will drop to a level sustainable by the natural environment."

Over the past year and a half Mitchell says the NBCS has (through the use of GPS tracking collars) been identifying ways we could drastically lower food resources available to coyotes. "We are calling this Passive Coyote Management," she says, "because it involves modifying our own behavior."

The NBCS is working to reduce these direct and indirect handouts to coyotes, through public education and outreach programs currently being developed, Mitchell said.

The school program is the first part of this effort. Program success will involve intensive community education as well as policy change at the state and town levels.

Mitchell said the NBCS plans to partner with URI's Coastal Resources Center by year's end to implement the larger statewide outreach program.

In the meantime, NBCS staff continues to collect coyote population and resource use data, update the website regularly with new data and findings, visit schools, and work with RI DEM to develop management policies.



Dr. Numi Mitchell (right) prepares to release a young coyote that has been fitted with a tracking collar.

Tips for controlling coyotes in Jamestown

The NBCS asks that residents practice the following habits to help limit the number of coyotes in Jamestown:

1. Never feed coyotes or leave out foods that might attract them. Secure all trash. Coyotes eat fruit, cereals, meats, small animals, and carrion.
2. Never feed pets outside.
3. Bring small pets inside at night or accompany them in heavily used coyote areas – any pet of woodchuck size or smaller is at risk.

4. A safe cat is an indoor cat. Outdoor cats or cat colonies are a magnet for coyotes.

5. If coyotes are staring at you, or following you, they probably think you are going to feed them. Remember many coyotes are trained to expect food from people.

6. Anyone uncomfortable with coyotes near them should yell or clap their hands loudly. Coyotes are very nervous animals, and should leave especially if it looks like someone is going to approach

them. If this does not work, yell and throw something.

7. Coyotes are not as big as people might think. The largest male coyotes weigh about 50 pounds – even though they are frequently reported to look 70 to 100 pounds.

8. Remember: fat coyotes are fertile coyotes. They have plenty of natural foods in Jamestown (mice, rats, woodchucks, rabbits, geese) they don't need more.

The NBCS Website is at www.theconservationagency.org/coyote.

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