

# Local scientist proposes 'coyote coexistence' animal feeding ordinance

By Phil Zahodiakin

A Jamestown scientist has applied a groundbreaking approach to her study on the growth of coyote populations on Conanicut and Aquidneck Islands. The research, led by biologist Numi Mitchell, has turned up a wealth of information in support of a draft ordinance that promises to manage coyotes more effectively than eradication campaigns.

The ordinance is part of the proposed Coyote Coexistence and Management Plan devised by the non-profit, Jamestown-based Conservation Agency and endorsed by the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

The ordinance is slated for debate by the Town Council on Monday, Nov. 2.

The Portsmouth and Middletown councils have both scheduled early November hearings on the draft, and a hearing date for the Newport Council is pending.

Mitchell, who is leading the Narragansett Bay Coyote Study for the Conservation Agency, says there are three to four coyote packs on Conanicut Island, and seven to eight on Aquidneck Island. Although there aren't any Jamestown reports of coyotes biting humans, a Prudence Island youngster has reportedly suffered a bite, and a Warwick coyote has tested positive for rabies. The animals have also been blamed for pet killings – especially in Newport.

The ordinance would prohibit people and businesses from feeding any wild animal, defining "feeding" as "the intentional or unintentional providing of an 'attractant' [such as food products, garbage, pet food, grain or salt] that is accessible to a wild animal." The ordinance defines "wild animals" as any species, including coyote, that isn't normally domesticated.

While the ordinance addresses intentional food subsidies, the coexistence plan proposes a number of steps to address unintentional subsidies. For example, the plan advises the four island towns to enact ordinances requiring swift and proper roadkill and farm carcass disposal. This is particularly important to farmers because coyotes learn to feed on specific animals once they sample their carcasses (The NBCS has received a federal grant to assist the towns with this piece of the management plan.).

NBCS data demonstrate that food subsidies are responsible for most coyote problems. The animals learn to associate people with food, and they develop dangerous behaviors because they lose their natural fear of humans, while learning that any food provided to other animals (intentionally or unintentionally) will be a reliable source of food for them.

The NBCS has confirmed that humans are keeping coyotes fed (intentionally or otherwise) from data transmitted by the global positioning system radio collars attached to members of the Aquidneck Island and Conanicut Island packs.

### 'Revolutionary' data

Mitchell says that the use of GPS data for a coyote study is "revolutionary," adding that "the NBCS research has generated some of the best data of any coyote study in the country."

Powerpoint slides graphically illustrate the effects of human subsidies: Enormous spikes wherever coyotes have discovered reliable food sources left intentionally or unintentionally by people.

"It's crucial to understand that coyotes are incredibly territorial," Mitchell said, using an area of eastern Middletown as an example. "They won't cross the tiniest stream if it has been marked by another pack. But once they find a subsidy, like the pile of unburied sheep carcasses we found near a farm in Middletown, they will shrink their territory to the area around the subsidy. Then, they begin killing sheep. In Jamestown, there are hardly any sheep killed because farmers are careful to bury any that die – and the coyotes don't acquire a taste for lamb chops."

The GPS data on Aquidneck Island packs also demonstrates that "any time a pack leaves their territory, another pack will always fill the void," Mitchell said, adding that this behavior would ensure the failure of eradication campaigns.

Coyotes have spread north and east from the southwestern U.S. as their principal predator – wolves – have disappeared. As a result, Mitchell said, "There are big coyote problems in lots of places besides Rhode Island – Florida,

See "Coyote" on page 11

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Finn says  
**Vote for  
Mike  
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I have lived in town since 1954 when I got off the old Governor Carr ferry. I attended Jamestown and Newport schools and graduated from De LaSalle in Newport. I attended Boston College for two years and was drafted into the Army as a private. I spent four years on active duty as a lieutenant teaching Artillery Survey. I then spent four years in the R.I. National Guard as an Artillery Battery Commander. I worked in marine and highway & heavy construction as a superintendent for R.I.'s Campanella Corporation.

In 1973, my former partner, Spenser Dickinson, and I started Solar Homes a manufacturer & distributor of solar heating equipment. We built many solar-heated homes in Rhode Island. Since 1975 I have run my own residential general contracting company.

My political experience: two terms as president of the Town Council; vice-chairman of the R.I. Public Building Authority; active in Bruce Sundlun and Lincoln Almond's campaigns for governor; Jamestown Planning Commission for seven years and was elected chairman; R.I. Builder's Association and a former director; past treasurer and president of the Jamestown Lions Club; the Jamestown Community Chorus. I serve on the board for Bridges Inc, which supports adults with developmental disabilities.

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In our busy lives we often find it convenient to let the other person take care of the problem. That's why we elect people to represent us. However, decisions are often made that seem contrary to our interests. We are told that if we go to a public meeting we will make a difference. We all have memories of attending the meetings and wondering who is going to talk for our interests. I intend to represent the property owners who have invested in the town. I will bring balance back to the discussions and support the taxpayers. I will be your voice and I will not be ambiguous in where I stand. At the same time, I am always ready to learn something new and I understand the problems of unintended consequences.

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