

The Coyote--A Relatively New Resident

Since its apparent appearance in the northeast in the early half of the twentieth century, the coyote has been known by many names, little wolf, brush wolf, coydog, prairie wolf or simply wild canid. Long a reported scourge to sheep and cattlemen in the west on the open range, the coyote is a relative newcomer to the east. A best theory suggests that as its cousin, the timber wolf, was reduced along the southern Canadian provinces, the coyote expanded into those territories from the mid-west. Over time, it pushed eastward into Ontario and Quebec eventually crossing the St. Lawrence River when iced over and moved into New Hampshire and Vermont, then northern New York and the rest of New England.

Commonly accepted now as the Eastern Coyote, *Carris latrans* var., its early expansions resulted in possible cross-breeding with wolves and dogs. Offspring of varied colored pelage and structure led to the variety of names. Today, the coyote typically breeds true. Although the fur may vary from blond to red to black, the grizzled grey with white and black markings are most common. As it walks or runs, it characteristically holds its bottlebrush tail down at an angle.

The late 1940's through the 50's and 60's saw the species expand through the Adirondacks and finally southward to the Catskills and western New York. In the early 1970, the coyote made its appearance in the north Avon area and since, has expanded throughout our counties.

Adaptability and opportunist are terms most descriptive of this species' habits. In the space of sixty years, the coyote has become the largest carnivore of the northeast except where black bear occur. A niche, position in species ecology, long since vacated by the wolf and cougar, killed and driven off by man, is now re-occupied.

While its colorful past is replete with loathsome expletives, the coyote is not all "bad guy". Devoted parental care and territorial protection during the breeding and whelping season lead to relative species' success. They interject at all levels of the food chain--"they'll eat anything from grass to goose," a noted wildlife biologist and coyote researcher has said--so are not dependent on any one species group for survival.

The majority of breeding occurs in late February. Four to eight pups are born nine weeks later in late April and early May. At this time, an enlarged fox den, woodchuck or rabbit burrow suffices for home. Raising pups creates a high protein demand so mice, muskrats, rabbits, woodchucks, ground-nesting birds, and similar species form the bulk of their diet. Pups and adults feast on insects, too, through the summer months. Late summer and fall sees their diet expand to include a high percentage of fruits and berries. While coyotes will seize and catch the foods they come upon, they are not at all above eating carrion and snatching any edible offerings off the highway, from compost piles or agricultural disposal areas. As other foods disappear in late fall and winter, road-killed critters may make up a good share of their diet.



After the pups leave the den in about two months, thickets, brush piles, hollow logs, rock ledges, dry culverts and even deserted buildings may serve as loafing and sleeping areas. Their home range may be as little as five square miles or as much as forty depending largely on food availability.

While capable of killing fawns and with teamwork taking adult deer in stressful conditions or deep snow, the coyote is not a limiting factor for deer populations. Again, they are opportunists and will not concentrate on killing large mammals. The energy expended and injury risks usually are not worth it. This is not at all to say their scat, droppings, won't contain deer hair. Remember, late fall and winter are times of large numbers of car/deer accidents and deer hunting season losses and simply critical winter conditions provide ample deer carcasses to consume.

Coyotes are not nearly as large as they may look. Males are slightly larger than females but usually not more than forty to forty-five pounds. Few exceed fifty pounds although heavier ones seem to be reported. In spite of their adaptability, their mortality is high. Coyotes are susceptible to diseases, parasites and starvation. Coyote social structure is not as finely developed as the timber wolf. The same pair may stay together in succeeding years, and an offspring may stick around to help care for the pups. The young grow quickly and disperse prior to the next breeding season. Females do not become sexually mature until two years old while males may breed their first year. The social pack of alpha male and

The Coyote

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female, subdominant adults and young of the timber wolf is not found with coyotes.

The New York State Legislature recognized this new resident by giving it "protected game status" in 1976. Trapping and hunting seasons are established to manage their numbers and allow lawful economic use of pelts. Most trappers would attest to the coyote as a very wary quarry. History from the west to the Adirondacks to western New York reveals much frustration in attempts to trap the coyote.

The species presence in all our counties regardless of urbanization speaks to its adaptability. While seldom seen due to its primarily nocturnal habits, the coyote may live from the heart of the Adirondacks to Irondequoit (and Mendon). Occasionally, this closeness reveals the negative side of the animal. The complaints of the western sheep and cattlemen were not without merit. The coyote will take advantage of opportunities presented. The State Department of Environmental Conservation receives complaints of coyotes taking lambs and sheep, as well as poultry and other barnyard stock. Coyotes usually only take what they will use but they may be persistent about it. Household dogs may also become a problem with stock and, being less adept at killing, may injure many more animals and thus cause more losses. Common sense and good animal husbandry practices usually solve and prevent most of these issues. However, even small losses can be frustrating.

Trapping and hunting seasons usually maintain a mutual respect and distance between the coyote and urban/residential problems. However, where these means of control are not practiced due to municipal ordinances, posting, and social preferences, the coyote may develop a more bold attitude in his dealings with us. The increase in this predator has coincided with a noticeable decrease of another, the "outdoor" and feral house cat. Small dogs, too, not under close supervision have been lost. One must remember that the coyote, like other wild predators, eats for a living. Again, common sense is the key to mutual existence.

To some, the cries, barks, and howls of coyotes are eerie and frightening. To others, they are a look back at primordial existence. To me, these socializing sounds are excitement, appreciation, and anticipated understanding of the wild. Mid-summer, early fall and late winter are the best times to listen on clear, calm nights to the vocalizing music of the coyote--a survivor.

~John R Hauber~

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Mendon's Wetlands

Over the last century, many viewed wetlands as unimportant areas that could be improved by draining and filling. Before the 1970's and 1980's, more than half of the nation's wetlands were lost to various forms of development.

The New York State Environmental Conservation's Law calls our freshwater wetlands "invaluable resources" and states that it is the public policy to preserve and protect them. The same law also recognizes that considerable acreage of freshwater wetlands has been lost and more is in jeopardy.

Here in Mendon we still have a significant number of wetland areas, but developers' bulldozers are an ever-increasing threat. It is up to us, the residents, to help preserve and protect our wetlands. Once they are sacrificed, they are gone forever.

What is a wetland?

According to the Environmental Conservation Law, freshwater wetlands are "lands and submerged lands, commonly called marshes, swamps, sloughs, bogs, and flats, supporting aquatic or semi-aquatic vegetation. These ecological areas are valuable resources, necessary for flood control, surface and ground water protection, wildlife habitat, open space, and water resources."

Why are wetlands so important?

a. Aside from their natural beauty and the open space they provide, wetlands protect the quality of our water. When it rains, pollutants, fertilizers, pesticides, grease and oil from motor vehicles, and even heavy metals are washed overland to bodies of water. Wetland plants provide resistance to slow the water down, and, in the process, the water runoff deposits many of the particles it is carrying. The roots of the wetland plants trap the sediments and prevent them from settling in stream beds and ponds.

b. Wetland plants actually absorb some pollutants and recycle them. For instance, wetlands trap nitrogen and phosphorus which cause excess plant and algae growth that degrade water quality. Microorganisms in wetland soil convert these nutrients to less harmful forms.

c. During periods of high water run-off from storms or snow melt, wetlands temporarily store some of the water, releasing it slowly and thus preventing downstream flooding and erosion.

d. Wetlands temporarily store water until it drains through the underlying soil and into the ground water system. This helps filter and maintain water supplies for us and for wildlife.

e. Wetlands provide resting areas for migrating birds, plus breeding grounds, food sources, and safe areas for all kinds of wildlife. About forty-five percent of endangered species rely on wetlands at some point in their life cycle.

What can we do to help protect wetlands in our area?

All of the wetlands in Mendon are mapped, and the maps are available at the Mendon Town Hall. Maps of wetlands are also available at the Department of Environmental Conservation in Avon.

Story continued on page seven



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PRESERVE, protect and enhance the scenic, natural, recreational and structural resources in the town of Mendon and directly adjacent properties,

MAINTAIN a responsible stewardship of assets and properties help or controlled by the corporation,

ESTABLISH and promote local environmental education on issues pertinent to the preservation of natural resources in the Town of Mendon.

ESTABLISH and promote programs to monitor the natural resources in the Town of Mendon.

As we succeed in these objectives, we enhance property values for all Mendon property owners. The Foundation is supported by membership fees, grants and other contributions. Donations to the Mendon Foundation are tax deductible.

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An Hour on the Trail

A couple of years ago, Dick Dehm and I investigated beaver activity along the Mendon Trail just west of Quaker Meeting House Road. While the day, as I recall, was overcast with a light mist or sprinkle, this outdoor experience was extremely enjoyable and enlightening.

The beaver created a dam adjacent to the trail and the impounded water created saturation of the trail surface. Our inspection centered on the need (or not) to alter* the dam to preserve the integrity of the trail. Review showed the dam was leaking in several locations, the result of no new or recent maintenance by the beaver. Thus the situation would resolve itself.

While the beaver dam and wet trail were the excuses for our visit, and rewarding of themselves, the myriad of other life on the trail was icing on the cake. Red-winged blackbirds were abundant and the males were announcing their territories as they swayed on last year's cattail plumes. A pair of cardinals darted back and forth in the willow and dogwood underbrush. Chickadees and other small birds moved through nearby looking for food stuffs and perching sites. Across the marsh, a great blue heron "lumbered" its way on long methodical wing beats. A pair of mallards could be seen on the newly constructed private marsh north of the trail.


While standing on the walkway surface discussing the beaver dam, we were startled by a wild turkey that flushed at the edge of the marsh and thundered its way to more comfortable quarters. I wondered as several teenagers passed along beside us, if any of these sights and animal activities were appreciated. Of course, they may have wondered the same about us.

Besides the animal life, the marsh was showing the burst of spring vegetation, brilliant green of reed canary grass leaves poking through the dried beige thatch of last year's growth, skunk cabbage pushing its purple and green variegated heads from the dark moist soil, willows and cottonwoods budding, duckweed proliferating on the marsh and new cattails searching for the sunlight. Regardless of season of the year, the Trail experience can leave a lasting appreciation of life in the outdoors.

Coincidentally, I renewed my acquaintance with this area in mid-January. Some members of the Foundation, interested adjacent landowners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are assessing this old beaver flow. Reconstruction and restoration may be possible to create a permanent open water and marsh habitat to benefit many species here. This project will be an interesting one to watch!

*Note: disturbance or impact to beaver or any of their structures requires licensing or specific damage permits from the State Department of Environmental Conservation.

~John Hauber~



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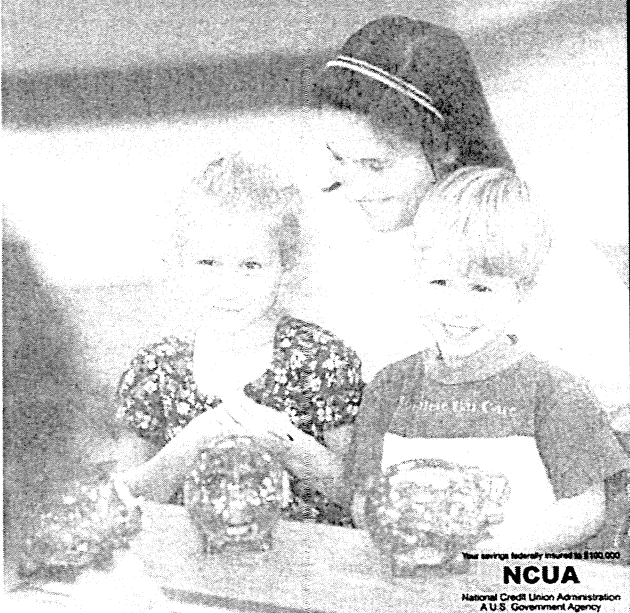
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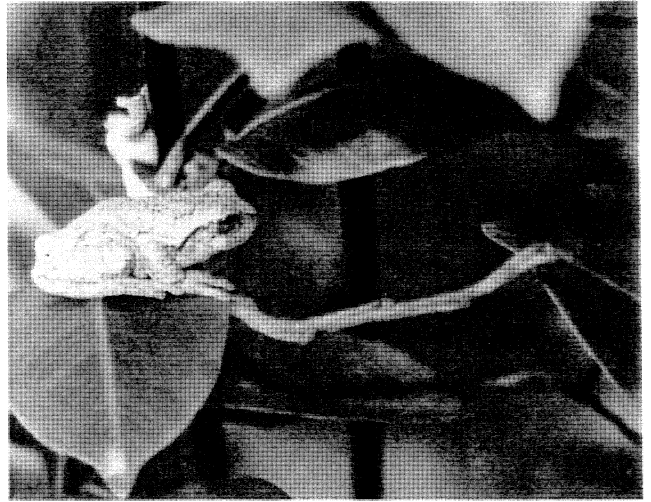


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A Letter From a Reader

To: Amelia Seiler
c/o The Mendon Foundation
Re: Green Tree Frogs



Dear Amelia,

I was so happy to see your article in the newsletter about Grey Tree Frogs. I have a “buddy” and now I know a lot more about him (her?) thanks to you. I was hoping you’d enjoy my story. I have been lucky enough not only to have seen one but to have one adopt me (or my plant to be exact!). During the summer I noticed the little guy living in one of my potted plants. I enjoyed him being there on my deck and was amused to find him somewhere in the vicinity whenever I looked. I used to collect frogs (not alive) since I was a teen and have all kinds of porcelain, crystal, stuffed and bejeweled replicas of what I consider “cute frogs”. (My husband says that’s an oxymoron.)

As the summer came to a close I decided he might need some help in the right direction to settle in for the winter so I took him over to the field next to our property that contains a very large retention pond where very large frogs, lots of birds and several deer frequent. To my surprise he was back on my deck and in the very same plant within days of transplanting him. I tried this once more when a cold spell was imminent and four hours later I found him halfway across our very large deck on his way back home!

Needless to say, I was perplexed and I was not about to have a \$25, very pretty flowering vine wither in an overnight freeze...so I brought the plant inside my home every night and took it back out into the sunshine every day. (About this time you are probably wondering if I have a life!) When November came, the pot stayed inside and so did my buddy. By this time he was named “Crash” by two very cute little girls because he decided to “crash” my pad! I looked up frogs on the Internet but because I did not know the exact species I never really found what I was looking for but I bought some moss and a small rock like “swimming pool” to put in the pot with “frog food” that resembles freeze-dried bugs which I have never seen him eat. He seemed perfectly content to stay in the pot climbing up and down the leaves and vines that were attached to a trellis I had inserted into the pot as the plant grew and extended.

In December, my husband (who has wickedly encouraged my Golden Retrievers to have a ‘snack’) was decorating one of our Christmas trees and when he unwrapped the several frog ornaments that I have collected over the years, he showed his true feelings when I found that instead of putting them on the tree he hung them on the trellis to decorate the frog’s home instead! (Now who doesn’t have a life!)

Sometime near Christmas one morning I found one of my goldens more interested in the kitchen floor than his food bowl. He had found the frog sitting in front of the refrigerator which is quite a long way and around the kitchen island from the plant. Well this was indeed a problem because now that I know they are nocturnal who knows what he’s been up to at night (never singing that I know of). I was afraid he’d get “shmitted” so I bought him a “critter cage” and felt terribly guilty but I keep telling myself he chose us and not the other way around. So now I take him out and play with him and put him in the plant during the day and put him back into the cage at night. Sometimes I let him hang out around the kitchen window sill while I do dishes.

By now you probably think I’m as nuts as my husband thinks I am. I really do have a life, I even volunteer and go to lunch with friends and all those normal things, I’ve just gotten attached and feel very responsible for this guy. Your description is exactly what mine looks like and if you have any suggestions about how to care for him, please let me know. I’m not big on getting him live bugs. I never see him eat, but he does enjoy the water and usually clings to the sides of the cage or the leaves of the plant instead of ever sitting in the moss or dirt. He changes color depending upon where he is and he seems to like being in my hands occasionally. If you find this totally ridiculous or unbelievable or you’d just like to see my friend, please come and see me and meet him! Thanks for listening and for the information.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Johns
Mendon, NY

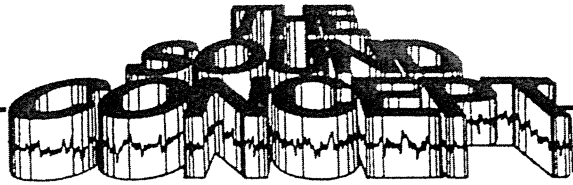
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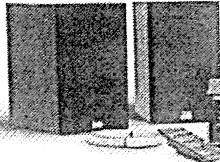
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Mendon's Wetlands

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If you have wetlands on your property, consider taking steps to keeping them forever wild. If you buy property that contains wetlands, work with the town to develop your land so that there is minimal impact upon the wetlands. Altering wetlands requires a permit. If you believe construction or development will endanger a particular wetland area, if you see wetlands about to be drained, dredged, filled, or excavated, make yourself heard at town meetings and planning board sessions.

New York State has laws for conserving wetlands. Unfortunately, they include a provision whereby a builder can build on a wetland and 'relocate' it elsewhere. Wetlands form a complex ecological entity involving soil, water, plant, and animal life. They have evolved over the centuries. Wetlands are not something that can be filled in one area and compensated for by dredging a pond or catch basin in another area.

Mendon has the authority to pass wetland provisions that are even more restrictive than the existing state law. In fact, Mendon's Planning Board is in the final stages of approving a long range plan that includes policies affecting our wetlands, but they do not, at present, eliminate the loophole mentioned above.

A strict policy, one that is rigorously enforced, is our best hope of preserving our Wetlands.

Note: I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Environmental Conservation in Avon for their patience in answering my questions and for the numerous publications they provided.

Information for this article came from the EPS's Wetlands Regulation Guidebook for New York State, Building Near Wetlands -- The Dry Facts, Freshwater Wetlands Program Applicant's Guide, Freshwater Wetlands Regulation and Mapping and Article 24 of the Environmental Conservation Law.

~Amelia Seiler~

A SPECIAL THANKS TO-

John R. Hauber, Fish and Wild life Officer with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, in Avon. John who lives in Lima, has contributed many wild life articles that have appeared in our newsletters over the years.

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