

Aurora launches online reporting system for coyote and fox sightings

Coyote sightings in your neighbourhood might be alarming, particularly to parents of small children or pet owners, but a new online reporting system launched last week by the Town of Aurora aims to educate residents on safety and how to live alongside coyotes, foxes and other wildlife.

The tool, which can be found at aurora.ca/coyotesighting, allows residents to log their sightings of these four-legged critters through an interactive form and map.

"This new tool will provide valuable information to Animal Services to target areas for patrols, install signage in areas with reported sightings, investigate concerns about wildlife feeding and support community outreach and education including awareness on how to keep families and pets safe," said the Town in a statement. "Residents can report sightings of coyotes and foxes, including details such as location, time, and type of sighting. Additionally, residents can specify if the animal appears sick or injured, or if there is a perceived risk to public safety. Users can also view all reported sightings on the map over the past three months."

The Town stresses coyotes and wildlife are important to the local ecosystem and typically don't pose a danger to people "cats and small dogs are another story" and this tool can help us "learn to co-exist with our wildlife if we respect them and take proactive steps to keep ourselves and our pets safe."

Lindsay Clarke, Supervisor of Animal Services for the Town of Aurora, who has been with the Town for five years, says in that time she has seen a marked increase in inquiries about coyotes and foxes within Aurora and, inspired by other communities, decided to create an initiative to keep the community engaged.

Some of the calls she and her department have received were requests to remove coyotes from any given area, but that is not what the department does.

"We wanted to promote co-existing with wildlife and consulted with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Coyote Watch Canada to best engage the community," says Clarke, noting this was a joint effort between herself and department, as well as Aurora's IT and Communications departments. "I wanted to break the stereotypes of coexisting with coyotes and foxes within our community so I wanted to provide the residents an opportunity to share their experiences with local wildlife [while] at the same time, also creating public awareness for the residents and to be mindful in certain areas, which are classified as high traffic areas."

Since its launch, Clarke says uptake of the new system has been swift and positive and will likely be on the rise as mating season has just finished and kits will soon be hunting for food.

"We're trying to turn the page on wanting animals removed from within our communities "because of all that new development, there is a lot of destruction of habitat happening. It's pushing foxes and coyotes into our urban areas and they are just trying to survive wherever they can," says Clarke. "Most of the sightings I have seen so far are animals living within those greenspaces behind residential zones. Some of those spaces are Town parks and then some of those spaces are future developments that haven't been built yet."

"If people have any questions or they're unfamiliar with coyotes and foxes "we do have a lot of new residents to Canada and I would encourage them to contact local animal services. We're always happy to help residents out. We constantly provide education regarding wildlife and we also receive seasonal training from our partnership with Shades of Hope "they're the ones that take any sick or injured wildlife from the Town of Aurora. We get a lot of training in order to provide the best education to residents as much as possible. We hope this sheds a positive light on coexisting with foxes and coyotes, especially in our communities."

TIPS TO KEEP YOURSELF AND PETS SAFE:

- Be cautious of your surroundings when walking around forests, ravines, and open spaces; - When walking your dog, keep them on a close leash and bring a whistle or stick with you to scare away a coyote; - Never leave pets outside unattended on your property, as coyotes can jump fences; - Prevent wildlife from coming onto your property by removing all food sources, including ripe fruit and bird seed, securing your garbage and compost, and fencing gardens off; - Do not approach coyotes or their dens, as this may provoke them.

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