



Fact Sheet 3.3 Do deer have natural predators?

When the Ridgefield hunt was originally being discussed in 2004, a common topic brought up was the idea that deer populations must be controlled by hunting due to the fact that deer's natural predators were negligible.

Dr. Mark Ashton (Yale Professor Forest Ecology and Director of School Forests) states, "CT has gained back many of our meso-to-macro scale predators: bobcat, bear, and coyote. All predate fawns, young deer and infirm or older individuals. Studies are now beginning to suggest that in the wilder parts of Connecticut, the deer populations are largely regulated by these predators - one such informal study by DEEP suggested of the 22 fawns recorded and followed, only 2 made it to maturity".

Coyotes, bobcats, and bears all prey on deer. Coyotes have been shown to prey on deer just as much as wolves do. All are present in CT (Dr. Ed Faison, MFS in Forest Science from Harvard University, and PhD in Environmental Conservation from the University of Massachusetts).

A coyote's diet consists predominantly of mice, woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, deer, some fruits, carrion, and when available, garbage (CT DEEP). With an estimated population of 3,000 to 5,000, coyotes are seen in every town in CT, and there is no dispute that coyote sightings, as with bears, have spiked in recent years.

Experts state that coyotes help to keep the state's wildlife populations in balance, and residents need to learn to live alongside the creatures. "The coyote population may be expanding even more," said Chris Vann, a wildlife biologist and the state's top coyote expert, "most Connecticut coyotes have litters of between 5-9 pups, and that 4-5 might manage to survive into late summer." Studies have shown that coyote

survival rates in some suburban areas are as high as 70 percent.

It seems more than likely that coyotes are now a permanent part of Connecticut's wildlife scene. A study several years ago by the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Environmental Science and Forestry estimated there were then about 14,500 breeding pairs of coyotes spread all across the state of New York.



Coy-Wolf (?) at the Hickories, April 2019

The Bottom Line

Deer in Ridgefield do have natural predators including coyotes, bobcats, and bears. CT has gained back many of these meso-to-macro scale predators.