

# Wilton Conservation Commission Newsletter



## COYOTE: SOMETHING TO FEAR OR REVERE

With the recent loss of a family dog, much attention is being paid to our population of coyotes. As evidenced by a 1993 article in this newsletter, the concern is not new to Wilton. The coyote is not native to Connecticut, being first documented in the 1950's and first recorded in Wilton some thirty years ago. Despite the relatively recent arrival of this canine, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection considers the population to be stable, not growing.

If the population is not growing, then how does one explain the increase in sightings? Coyotes are opportunistic, and while their numbers are not increasing, their willingness to exploit suburban food sources is. Our compost piles, bird feeders, gardens that attract rabbits and other rodents, garbage cans, dog bowls, water sources, and the occasional person who intentionally feeds them, provide endless opportunities for an easy meal. Combine the availability of food, a propensity to be territorial, and a lowered fear of humans and we have a recipe for problems.



Fortunately, the coyote foreshadows trouble with incremental behavioral changes. The first sign of territorial behavior is not killing the family pet; there will likely be several indicators that preceded such a distressing act. Patterns to watch for are:

- 1) An increase in observing coyotes on streets and in yards at night
- 2) An increase in coyotes approaching people
- 3) Early morning and late afternoon daylight observance of coyotes on streets and in parks and yards
- 4) Daylight observance of coyotes chasing or taking pets
- 5) Coyotes attacking and taking pets on leash or in close proximity to their owners; coyotes chasing joggers, bicyclists, and other adults
- 6) Coyotes seen in and around children's play areas, school grounds, and parks in mid-day
- 7) Coyotes acting aggressively toward adults during mid-day

The best means to prevent this behavior from progressing is to keep coyotes wary of humans. When they are seen, scare them off using loud sounds, spraying the hose and/or throwing sticks or stones. Do not let the coyote intimidate you. Do not engage the animals with pleasant calls or sounds. Definitely reduce/eliminate food sources. Food source is a trigger for defending a territory. Taking of small pets may not be an issue of territory. Pets such as cats and small dogs are seen as prey and as the coyote becomes more comfortable closer to your home, the more vulnerable your pet is.

Seeing wildlife amid our suburban landscape is a gift. But even this gift has to be managed responsibly such that we do not inadvertently contribute to a situation that results in harm to ourselves, our pets, or the coyote.

**Patricia M.P. Sesto**

*Director of Environmental Affairs*

## THINKING ABOUT OUR DRINKING WATER

In recent years, drinking bottled water has gained tremendous popularity all over the country. Small water bottles are easy to carry and disposable (recyclable) which make them convenient for our fast-paced lifestyles. Their convenience, however, does come with a price.

Bottled water costs much more than tap water on a per gallon basis. People often complain about rising gas or milk prices when they spend the same if not more per gallon of bottled water. Paying attention to the price of bottled water may encourage people to think about drinking tap water over bottled water.

According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health's (CTDPH) website, tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and bottled water is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration which bases its drinking water standards on the EPA's tap water standards. The CTDPH explains that some bottled water is treated less than tap water or not treated at all. The CTDPH reports that bottled water and tap water are both safe to drink if the water meets the drinking water standards.

"Think Outside the Bottle" is a grassroots organization dedicated to educating the public about the environmental and economic impacts of choosing bottled water over tap water. The organization's mission is to encourage people to sign a pledge to opt for public tap water over bottled water and to support the efforts of local officials who prioritize strong public water systems over bottled water. The group's website ([www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org](http://www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org)) explains that a massive amount of energy is required to bottle and transport water and to dispose of used water bottles. The group claims, "Making bottles to meet Americans' demand for bottled water required more than 17 million barrels of oil last year – enough fuel for more than 1 million U.S. cars for a year – and generated more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide." Clearly, opting for tap water can help conserve our world's fuel oil reserves and fight global warming by reducing carbon dioxide emissions into our air.

"Reduce, Reuse & Recycle" has been a catch

phrase for the environmental movement over the past two decades. In determining whether to drink bottled water or tap water, it is important to remember to try and reduce the number of bottles we consume. Reusing an empty bottle by refilling it with clean, fresh tap water can help save the environment and keep some money in your pocket. If people reused each bottle just once, the amount of oil used to create and ship bottled water is instantly and easily cut in half and may help save up to 8.5 million barrels of oil each year.

Most Wilton residents have access to wonderful natural well water directly from their private wells. Refilling a water bottle and recycling it instead of throwing it in the trash is another way each of us can help to conserve our precious natural resources.

**Michael Conklin**  
*Environmental Analyst*

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## RECYCLING IN WILTON

Everyone should be recycling as much as possible. Items which may be recycled vary from town to town and state to state. In Wilton, we have everyday recycling and special recycling.

The recycling which uses the "Blue Boxes" includes glass, metal food containers, plastics #1 and #2 without their tops, newspapers tied in bundles, and flattened corrugated cardboard. Most haulers take all of these items weekly. Mixed papers, scrap metal including appliances, clothing and other items

*Continued on page 4*

### WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION



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## IMPROVE YOUR SOIL BY RAKING LESS

If you dread the annual fall leaf-raking marathon, I have good news for you: Raking and collecting leaves every autumn is a tradition without scientific basis. Research has proven that mowing leaves into your lawn can improve its vigor, and observation shows that unraked leaves in planting beds don't smother shade-tolerant perennials. Based upon research at several universities, the organic matter and nutrients from leaves mown into lawn areas has been proven to improve turf quality. At Michigan State, researchers set a rotary mower to cut at a height of 3 inches and then mowed an 18-inch-deep layer of leaves into test plots. That's the equivalent of 450 pounds of leaves per 1,000 square feet. The tests resulted in improved soil and healthy lawns with few remnant leaves visible the following spring. You can achieve similar results if you set your mower to cut at the same height as in the Michigan State study, and mow at least once a week during peak leaf fall when your lawn reaches a height of 4 inches. Leaves shred most efficiently when slightly damp, so mow after a light dew. If you follow these simple guidelines, you will never rake another leaf and improve the quality of your soil.

### ***BUILD PLANTING BEDS WITH LEAVES***

Under trees or in other shady spots where a lawn won't grow, you can create planting beds from fallen leaves as a source of soil-building organic matter. Shredded leaves applied as mulch protect tree roots from heat and cold and retain soil moisture during dry spells. Some gardeners believe that excess leaves can harbor insects or disease, but I have

experienced no such problems in my garden.

After we bought our property, I created planting beds where the leaves would naturally collect on our densely shaded and sparse front lawn. It's been 15 years since I've raked a single leaf dropped by these trees. Instead, the leaves settle among the hellebores, epimediums, Japanese forest grass, hostas, and spring-flowering bulbs, where they decompose over time, just like on the forest floor.

### ***EASY, ECOLOGICAL, AND FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE***

To treat leaves as trash is both environmentally foolish and financially ruinous. Currently, many municipalities encourage residents to rake leaves to the curb for collection, but before they are collected, heavy rains often wash the leaves into catch basins. There, they decompose and release phosphorus and nitrogen into streams and rivers that flow through the community. These excess nutrients contribute to algae blooms during the summer, which result in lower oxygen levels, making it difficult for fish and other aquatic species to survive. Municipalities, both large and small, spend thousands, even millions, of dollars each year to collect, transport, and process autumn leaves, tying up resources that could be used elsewhere in our communities. If we all keep our leaves on our properties, we will improve our gardens, save money, and enhance the environment we all share.

—Terry Ettinger is a certified nursery professional and arborist in Syracuse, New York.

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### **Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited ~ Active in River Restoration in Town**

The Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited is a local conservation organization whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. Comprised of more than 500 members from the towns of Wilton, Ridgefield, Norwalk, New Canaan, Darien, Stamford and Greenwich, the chapter is involved in river restoration projects on local streams, educational programs in the schools and river clean-up programs.

The chapter helped pay for the trout hatchery programs in Wilton High School and in the Greenwich schools, supports a river study program with Greenwich middle school students, hosts a Special Olympics fishing derby at Merwin Meadows each year and has conducted river restoration projects in Wilton on the Norwalk River since 1996. It is a founding member of the Norwalk River Watershed Initiative.

Information: [www.mianustu.org](http://www.mianustu.org)

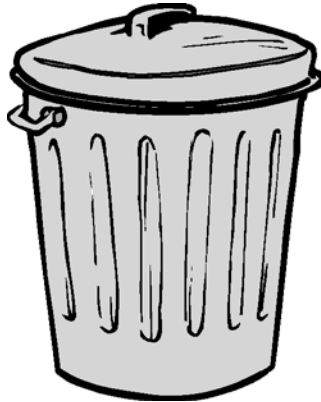
# RECYCLING IN WILTON

*Continued from front page 1*

may be taken directly to the Transfer Station on Mather Street. There is also a recycling container by the Town Hall Annex for bottles, cans, and plastics #1 and #2.

Wilton recycles through the South West Regional Operating Committee which is under the Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority. Our recycling goes to Stratford, Connecticut, where there is a Recycling Museum next to the Center with a walkway to the Center so one can watch the sorting. For information about tours and Museum hours, call 203-381-9571.

This year, a Recycling Club has been established at Wilton High School by teacher Steve Bell and the Club already has 35 members. They started by recycling mixed papers (something generated in quantity by the High School) and hope to expand into other recyclables by the first of the year.



Each fall the town sponsors a Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day to remove pesticides, fertilizers, paints, and other chemicals from our waste stream. Wilton residents may also go to neighboring towns on other weekends if the one Wilton hosts is inconvenient. Wilton's collection is one of the biggest in the state; attesting to our commitment of conscientious disposal of hazardous material.

In the spring of 2008, the Town will have another Electronics Recycling Collection. This collection was well received in the past. It is important to keep the two special collections separated as neither will accept items for the other.

Recycling is one thing we can all do to help the environment. Just bringing reusable bags to the supermarket helps.

**Naomi Dempsey**

*Vice Chairman*

*Conservation Commission*



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