

Coyote on camera captures 'keystone carnivore' at Waban's TREE Center

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Editor's Note. This is the eighth installment in a series about Waban Project's Team-building Recreation and Environmental Education (TREE) program.

SANFORD — Groups studying environmental education at Waban's TREE Center have captured some great images with the use of a trail camera.

Activated by movement, the camera snaps photos at intervals until no more movement is detected, day or night. Recent warm-weather activity has produced images of gray squirrels, white tail deer and wild turkeys, but the most exciting photo in TREE's collection of wildlife images is of a coyote at night. The camera captured the image in the spring, while there was still snow on the ground.

"We were thrilled to capture images of this keystone carnivore," said Ann Rossignol, the director of the TREE Center. "We've captured other animals on the camera, but none as exciting as the coyote. The trail camera has proved to be a great piece of equipment to view wildlife in their natural surroundings."

The coyote, a wild cousin to the domestic dog and wolf, is one of Maine's significant predators that are essential in maintaining a healthy and sustainable ecosystem. Not only do coyotes add diversity to Maine's carnivore populations, but more importantly they keep the balance of predator and prey in a habitat.

As important as coyotes are, though, their history in Maine hasn't been pleasant. Conservation biologist Geri Vistein, who has spent her career working with coyotes all over North America, has made major strides in restoring the public's relationship with these creatures.

"In order for carnivores to survive and play their role effectively in the ecosystems of Maine, our communities need to be informed and knowledgeable about their ecology and value, and to understand and practice coexistence skills," she said.

To learn more about Vistein's work and view her list of coexistence skills, visit online at <http://www.coyotelivesinmaine.com>.

Students at the TREE Center have already begun to learn about coyotes and what major roles they play in the environment, so that one day humans and coyotes can coexist and lead mutually healthy lives.

The TREE Center is a social enterprise of Waban. See more photos from the trail camera online at www.facebook.com/TREEctr.



courtesy photo: A camera mounted on a tree along one of the trails of Waban's TREE program captured this nighttime image of a native coyote last spring.