

JANUARY 1 - 14, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

WINTERBERRY



Winterberry, dwarf, *Ilex verticillata* 'Red Sprite'
© Dick Harlow



Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata* © Dick Harlow

Winterberry is a small to medium sized shrub of the Holly Family producing red berries that are clustered in particular areas around the stem. The fruit is very attractive to songbirds in winter, such as the Eastern Bluebird, American Robin or Cedar Waxwing. Other wildlife has been known to enjoy these fruits, such as Gray Squirrel and Eastern Chipmunk.

Winterberry has been popular enough that various varieties have been cultivated from the native species, including dense shrubs to small compact dwarf types.

This shrub requires minimal care and is a fine pick if you want wildlife to occasionally visit your yard in winter.

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Winterberry, dwarf, *Ilex verticillata* 'Red Sprite'
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As can be seen in the first picture these red berries against white snow in your garden make for a pleasant image during a cold and wintery scene.

EASTERN BLUEBIRD



Eastern Bluebird, Male, *Sialia sialis*
© Dick Harlow

Now add the Eastern Bluebird visiting your garden to partake of some fruit as in a few berries of the winterberry. Add snow, red of the berries, blue of the bluebird, what a show you have on a cold winter's morning while drinking a hot cup of java!!



Eastern Bluebird, Male, *Sialia sialis*
© Dick Harlow

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Using adjectives, I would characterize this species as gregarious, cooperative, family oriented and a careful tidy homemaker. Bluebirds nest in a box or hollowed out abandoned woodpecker holes. The nest of the bluebird is carefully constructed of various types of grasses. Their neatness is evident in the shape and construction of the nest. It is not haphazard, dumped willy-nilly in the box, but woven and precise, just fitting the inside dimensions of the box. However their neatness is paramount in rearing young. Plus, they have the help of previous young or last year's siblings.

All birds have ecto-parasites, and the nesting habits of some birds lead to difficult times due to an abundance of parasites and biting flies. Bluebirds, on the other hand, don't seem to have this extensive problem. Some of the possible reasons are that they take good care of their nests; they steadfastly remove fecal pellets. In the nest I have witnessed, it is as clean at the end of the nesting season as it was at the beginning. I know birds behave on instinct and associational behavior, but to me they seem to be conscious of who they are feeding, i.e. they seem to recognize each of their offspring. Will there be a runt of the litter? Of course. Will one get less food than another? Sure, it happens. But, generally bluebirds are more successful in rearing 3-4 young a year than other related species if everything else is equal.

The primary problem this species has is with the House Sparrow, or English Sparrow, who will surreptitiously enter a bird box when adults are not there and puncture the eggs or kill the young or even kill a brooding female. This is solely to gain a nesting spot for itself. This is part of the reason this species has been so successful since caged birds from Europe were released in New York City in the mid to late 1850's. They became well established by the 1880's and now you can find them in all 48 states.

Are bluebirds helpless? No. But, as much as bluebirds are territorial and will defend their box, if both are out feeding or the female is in the box incubating and the male out finding food, the female has little protection. Most birds of one species will recognize another species' "right" of space and will not try and usurp or fight. Same species yes, but different species no, not usually. That is not the case with the House Sparrow!

If not for the help of humans making bird boxes and putting them up in appropriate areas for bluebirds to nest, as well as dealing with the House Sparrow problem when it arises, bluebirds would be more rare today.

EASTERN COYOTE or COYWOLF



(1) Eastern Coyote, *Canis latrans* x *Canis lycaon*
© foresthillscathospital.com

According to Wikipedia, "The Eastern Coyote, also known as the **Coywolf**, is a wild North American canine of mixed coyote-wolf parentage that is present in New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. In other words it is not a purebred, and thus has the biological rank of hybrid.

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(2) Western Coyote, *Canis latrans*

© Wikipedia

One can see from the first picture (1) that this canine is certainly heavier, more robust than its western relative (2). A peer-reviewed paper in 2010 *Northeastern Naturalist* by Jonathan G. Way, Linda Rutledge, Tyler Wheeldon and Bradley N. White, examined the genetic relationship, (DNA & RNA) between eastern canine species and the western canine species. The results showed that the eastern population contained RNA relationships with Western Coyotes and Eastern Wolves, (picture 3) which is consistent with their hybrid origin. They also found that there was **NO** genetic (DNA & RNA) evidence of either *C. lupus familiaris* (Domestic Dog) or Gray Wolf, *C. lycaon*, mitochondrial DNA in the animals. These results indicate that the Eastern Coyote should more appropriately be termed "Coywolf" to reflect its hybrid (*C. latrans x lycaon*) origin.

Here at EastView, I have to admit, I have only seen signs (tracks, scat and earth scratching's) and have heard Coyotes outside our cottage and in the field, but have not seen the actual animal. I think it is exciting to have this kind of wildlife at our doorstep.



(3) Eastern Timber Wolf, *Canis lycaon*

© Wikipedia

"The original wolf found in the Northeast was most probably the smallish (~60 pound) Eastern Timber Wolf, (*Canis lycaon*), which is very closely related to (and possibly the same species as) the red wolf (*Canis rufus*)." However, there is a difference, picture #3 shows some remarkably similar characteristics to the animal in picture #1. I think one can see the similarities of both species. At any rate, the Eastern Coyote we hear outside our cottages in the spring, fall and winter yipping and howling at night, should more appropriately be called the Coywolf. But, I suppose we will traditionally think of it as simply either Coyote or Eastern Coyote instead of Coywolf. Maybe the wolf part of the name is too threatening to us and to our small pets.

However, our smaller dogs seem to instinctively know to stay inside when they sense Coywolves!

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Eastern Coyote (Coywolf) – Heard
Red Fox
Gray Squirrel
Eastern Cottontail
Meadow Vole

Weather Tidbits

Month of JANUARY 1-14, 2017

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 14.6 mm or 0.6 inches

Overcast Days: 4

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: -4.1 C⁰/24.6°F
High Temp: 17.4 C⁰/63.3°F
Low Temp: -20.3 C⁰/-4.5°F

DAYS

MAX <0.0 C⁰ 6 DAYS

MIN >0.0 C⁰ 12 DAYS

MAX <-18.0 C⁰ 2 DAYS

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