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**Protect Your Pets from These Tiny Township Predators**

by IRENE WILSON, WENDAKE BEACH



*Fishers are agile, fast and vicious.*

In the summer months we've all seen notices stapled to hydro poles about lost pets. These notices are more commonly found in areas with rentals and visitors who may not be familiar with the township and bring their pets with them on vacation. However, none of us should feel complacent. Our area teems with wildlife that is less visible when there are higher levels of human traffic, but which still come out to hunt and feed. Our lovely forests, streams, fields and beaches are attractive habitats for predators, some of which you may not be aware of. Here are six to watch out for.

**1. Coyotes** live throughout the township and can be heard yipping and howling at night. Occasionally they may be spotted during the day. They look like large, scruffy grey dogs. The Eastern Coyote found in Ontario is larger due to interbreeding with wolves. They hunt in packs and prey on sheep, calves, deer, rabbits, rodents, and pets. Even a large dog should not be let out in the evening unattended or allowed to wander into forest areas alone.

**2. Fishers** are members of the weasel family with shiny brown and black fur, are less well known but have a reputation for being vicious. They are the only animal that preys on porcupines by attacking the face and neck, and then flipping them on their back to access the unprotected belly. Fishers are 3 to 4 feet long, including the tail. Females weigh 4-6 lbs; males, 8-13 lbs. They are agile and fast, have sharp fangs and long retractable claws, and are most active at dawn and dusk,

though I have spotted one during the day in a lightly wooded area of a Midland golf course. Garbage, pet food left outdoors, and small pets such as house cats will attract fishers.

**3. Red foxes** are a common sight and quite used to living near humans. I have seen them often trotting down the side of Tiny Beaches Road during quieter times of the year. They tend to prefer small rodents such as chipmunks, mice and squirrels, but have been known to attack a cat.

**4. Great horned owls** make their habitat throughout Ontario, are nocturnal hunters most active at dawn and dusk, but will occasionally hunt during the day and are not discriminating about what they eat. They prey on a large variety of animals, including mice, rabbits, fish and yes, the occasional house cat. They reside in forests but will hunt in swamps, fields and even over open water.

**5. Raccoons** are not known to hunt pets, but they have very sharp claws and teeth and will attack if threatened. City raccoons are much more acclimatized to living with humans than the resident population in Tiny.

**6. Skunks** are common throughout Tiny, and although they will not attack your pets they will spray if disturbed. Both skunks and raccoons are mainly nocturnal and attracted by garbage or compost.

Keep your pets indoors at night. If walking near a forest or treed area, keep them on a leash and supervised so that they do not attract or disturb our resident wildlife.

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