

Reducing Human-Coyote Conflicts

- Never deliberately feed a coyote or other wild mammal.
- Securely cover garbage cans and compost bins.
- Remove fallen fruit from yards.
- Eliminate opportunities for rats to breed in and around your yard.
- Never deliberately approach a coyote, and teach children to respect all wildlife from a distance.
- Keep house pets indoors and allow only controlled access to the outdoors (fenced yards and leashes). Always keep pets inside from dusk to dawn, when coyotes are most active.
- To prevent coyotes from entering your yard, consider removing unnecessary brush, installing a motion-sensitive lighting system, or installing a coyote-proof fence. To be effective, fences must be at least six feet tall, have no openings greater than four inches, and should extend flush with the ground.
- If you do not want coyotes around your home, let them know that they are not welcome. If you see a coyote, shout and make noise, wave your arms.



Living with Urban Wildlife

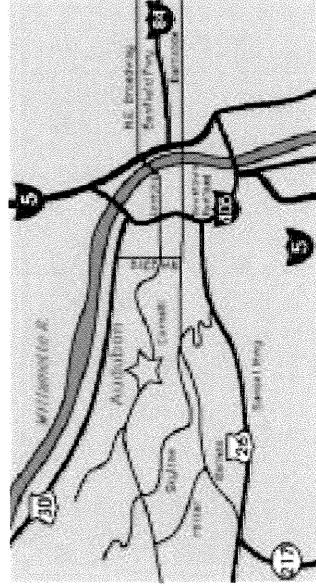
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Photo: Jim Cruce

Urban Coyotes



Living with Urban Coyotes

Natural History

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are members of the dog family. *Canis latrans* means "barking dog." This highly adaptive species was originally considered native only to the western two thirds of the United States, but landscape alterations and the elimination of large predators have allowed it to expand its range throughout North America. Until the 1940s, coyotes in Oregon were considered somewhat rare west of the Cascades.

Thick, dense fur can sometimes make coyotes appear larger than they really are. In Oregon, coyotes typically weigh between 22 and 30 pounds. Their primary diet is made up of small rodents, but coyotes are opportunistic and will consume a vast array of foods including birds and insects, fruit and vegetables, human garbage and compost, outdoor pet food and small, free-roaming pets.

Coyotes are monogamous and can be found as lone individuals, pairs, or members of packs similar to wolves. Typically, only the dominant pair breeds and produces one litter per year. Breeding occurs between January and March, with a gestation period of 62 days. Litters range from 4-7 pups and young will remain with the parents until late summer, learning how to hunt. Coyotes are at home in a variety of habitat types and will den in burrows, under downed trees, in thick brambles, and culverts.

While coyotes are most active between dusk and dawn, they can be seen at any time of the day. Generally shy and wary of humans, they can also be quite curious and will often observe human activity from what they perceive to be a safe distance. They will protect active dens from predators, including other coyotes and dogs.

Despite widespread efforts to reduce coyote populations, coyotes have managed to survive and thrive in and among human populations. Sightings in and around Portland began in the 1980s and have in-

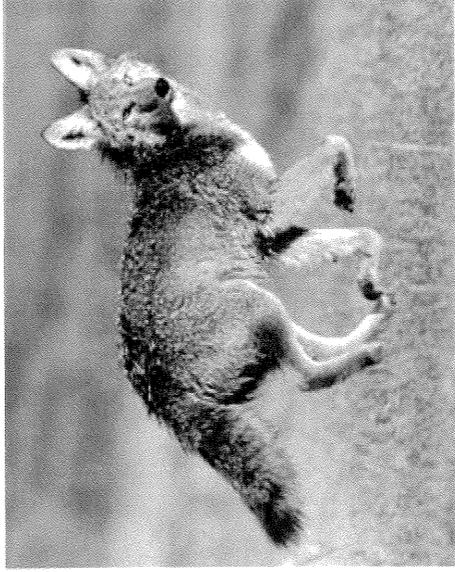


Photo: Jim Cruce

creased over the past 15 years. While most frequently sighted near natural areas, coyotes have also been seen deep into the urban interior. By providing accessible garbage cans, compost bins, outdoor pet bowls, and free-roaming pets, humans have inadvertently promoted urban coyote populations. Coyotes typically do not present risks to humans and with a few behavior modifications we can learn to coexist and appreciate the animal that Navajo sheep and goat herders referred to as "God's dog."

Coyotes and Humans

Unless habituated to humans, coyotes are generally shy and wary and present a minimal risk to humans. There has been only one human death attributed to coyote predation in the United States. This occurred in California in the 1970s when a coyote that had been deliberately habituated to human handouts preyed upon his human feeder's three-year-old child. In Oregon, the only documented "attack" on a human was a provoked situation in which a man was bitten while attempting to beat a cornered coyote to death with a 2x4. Those incidents that have occurred nationwide most often fall into the category of nips, bites, and scratches rather than predatory attacks and almost always follow situations in which the coyote has been deliberately habituated to human handouts.



Photo: Jim Cruce

Coyotes and Pets

Coyotes are opportunistic and will prey upon free-roaming cats and small dogs. The best prevention is to keep pets under control either indoors, on a leash, or within a fenced yard. Regardless of whether coyotes are present or not, the average lifespan of an outdoor cat is less than two years. Outdoor cats face potential death from cars, disease, parasites, abuse, and dogs, in addition to coyotes. The only way to truly protect pets is to keep them contained or under direct control whenever they are outdoors.

Realities of Coyote Control

It is illegal to relocate a coyote in the State of Oregon. It is also illegal to hold a coyote in a captive situation in the State of Oregon. The only alternative for coyotes that need to be removed from a specific location is euthanasia.

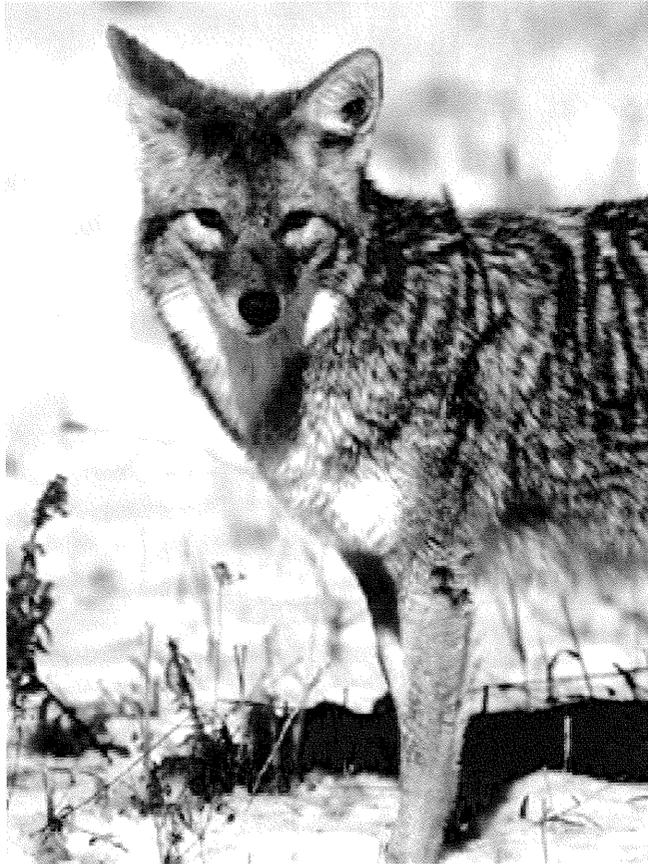
Coyotes are notoriously difficult to "live trap." There are three common methods for eliminating coyotes in urban and suburban environments: leg hold traps, neck snares, and sodium cyanide devices. None of these devices is selective in what it captures and all present real risks to pets and non-target wildlife.

While coyote control can be effective in eliminating specific individuals, it will not help reduce local populations. Coyotes have a compensatory, density-dependant breeding rate. Killing coyotes disrupts population structure, causing more coyotes to breed and have larger litters. Coyotes will also quickly fill into vacated habitat from adjacent areas. For these reasons, eradication efforts frequently lead to increases in local coyote populations.

COYOTES IN COOK COUNTY

Facts and Management Strategies

Coyotes have become much more visible in the metropolitan area in recent years. Unfortunately, conflicts between people and coyotes have also increased. In 2000, the Cook County Animal & Rabies Control Agency joined forces with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, and Ohio State University to create the Cook County Coyote Research Project. Our researchers study local coyotes, develop strategies to address public concerns and provide information about this animal to the public.



While the research component of this project continues, we have gathered enough information to make some valuable assessments about how people and coyotes can cohabit as safely as possible in Cook County.

What are coyotes?

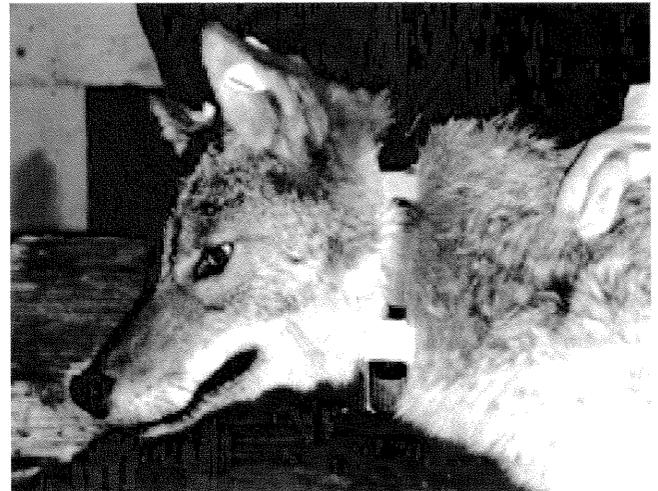
Coyotes are members of the dog family, which also includes wolves and foxes. They are typically medium-sized, weighing between 30 and 35 pounds, but their long legs and thick fur can make them look larger.

Where do coyotes come from?

Coyotes are native to Illinois. By the early 20th century, urban and agricultural development had largely wiped them out from the region. In recent years, however, coyotes have returned and are now frequently seen in metro Cook County as well as many other urban and suburban areas throughout the United States.

What do urban coyotes eat?

The diet of our urban coyotes varies, depending on location and season. Major food items include rodents, rabbits, deer (probably from roadkill) and fruit. Our research shows that it is very uncommon for coyotes to eat trash or other food associated with people, and it appears to be rare for the animals to forage from garbage cans.



A coyote fitted with a radiocollar.

Do coyotes live in packs?

Many coyotes live in family groups of two to six members. The territorial areas of groups are relatively small, and groups defend their territories from other coyote groups. Other coyotes are solitary, moving across large areas of land waiting for territories to become available or seeking their own home territory. Both solitary coyotes and small groups occur throughout most of Cook County, and all animals seem to prefer tracts of undeveloped land.

How long do coyotes live?

Coyotes in Cook County have a 50% chance of living through a year, with few coyotes living to adulthood. The greatest cause of mortality is collisions with vehicles. Coyotes carry few diseases that impact people, and disease also appears to play a minimal role in animal mortality.



A litter of coyote pups in Cook County

Are coyotes dangerous?

Our research shows that most coyotes avoid people, and the animals are only occasionally or rarely seen. The exception to this tendency occurs when a coyote loses its natural fear of people, which can result in a particular animal being more regularly visible during the day, or less likely to leave a place that humans frequent, like a yard.

Coyotes are predators, and they are well adapted to hunt for food. They have also evolved to defend territories from other dog-like animals, and these traits sometimes create conflicts with people and pets.

Coyotes occasionally attack pets, including free-ranging housecats and small dogs, especially when these pets are left unsupervised in areas with territorial coyotes. Occasionally, coyotes can threaten large dogs or people during the mating season (from January through March) and breeding season (April through May). Sometimes people unintentionally approach a den with pups, and the parents will defend the den with growls and barks.

In the Midwest, no serious attacks on people have been documented. In the southwestern United States, some attacks have occurred – usually involving children and often in the wake of increasingly bold behavior from the animal. Supplying coyotes with food – either on purpose or accidentally – can cause animals to become more aggressive.

Coyote Management Strategies

Coyotes are incredibly difficult to capture, and when an animal is removed from an area another coyote may quickly appear to occupy the available territory. In most situations, prevention is the most effective strategy to minimize coyote/human conflict.

Preventive strategies include:

- Prohibiting the feeding of coyotes or other wildlife
- Supervising pets and children if coyotes are regularly spotted in the area
- Making loud noises or producing other deterrents when coyotes are spotted in or near yards

Coyotes should be removed by professionals if they are repeatedly spotted during the day in yards, if they act aggressively toward pets, or if they follow children. Removal should target the problem animal only instead of all animals in a region, since general removal of the entire coyote population in an area is rarely successful.

If you encounter aggressive or threatening coyotes in Cook County, contact us for assistance!

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