Coyotes are usually wary of people and will avoid us whenever possible. Bold behavior is unusual and is most often a result of habituation due to intentional or unintentional feeding, the presence of a dog, or the coyote defending a den and young. If you encounter a coyote, remember the following:

- Never feed or try to "fame" a coyote; appreciate coyotes from a distance.
- Walk dogs on leashes; pick up small dogs if a coyote is near.
- If approached, be BIG and LOUD. You can also scare the animal by blowing a whistle, shaking a can with coins inside, popping open an umbrella, or throwing objects (toward but not at the coyote). Do not run from a coyote; calmly leave the area.

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Coyote Management

Historically, our society has attempted to solve human-coyote conflicts through killing. However, despite decades of poisoning, trapping, and shooting coyotes, there are more coyotes in North America today. Why?

The coyote's remarkable success appears to be closely related to human attempts to control their populations. As with many wild species, coyote populations are naturally regulated by available food and habitat. Lethal control, however, can disrupt the group hierarchy, allowing more coyotes to reproduce, encouraging larger litter sizes because of decreased competition for food and habitat, and increasing pup survival rates. It is also highly likely that lethal control favors the survival of the most resilient and genetically robust coyotes.

At least half a million coyotes are killed each year—one per minute—by federal, state and local governments and by private individuals in North America. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program kills approximately 90,000 coyotes each year. Most of this killing is carried out in the name of “livestock protection” and is a taxpayer subsidy for agribusiness/anchmers.

Coyote Conflicts

The very traits that have allowed coyotes to thrive, adapt, and coexist with people even in the most populated regions of North America have also led to conflicts with us and our domestic animals. Most coyotes fear people. However, those who associate people with food may become habituated to our presence. The abundance of food, water, and shelter offered by urban landscapes—counpled with unsecured garbage, unfenced gardens, and unattended domestic animals—can lead to conflicts. Documented cases of coyotes injuring people are very rare and most often related to people intentionally or unintentionally feeding them. Coyotes become more active, vocal, and territorial during mating and pupping seasons (see chart reverse). Pay particular attention to your coyote/victim’s safety during these times and do not let them roam.

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Approximately one coyote is killed every minute of every day. In North America—approximately 1,000,000 coyotes are killed each year. Despite scientific evidence suggesting this approach is misguided and ultimately ineffective, the emphasis on lethal coyote control persists. Coyotes are also killed for their fur, for “sport,” and in “body-count” contests where prizes are awarded for killing the most coyotes. Most states set no limit on the number of coyotes that may be killed, nor do they regulate the killing methods.

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Coyote Ecology

Two hundred years of costly persecution has not eliminated the resilient coyote from our landscape. In fact, coyotes have expanded their range two to threefold since the 1850s, largely in response to human changes to the environment and the eradication of wolves. Coyotes have adapted to living close to people and now inhabit even the most densely populated metropolitan cities from Boston to San Francisco, Austin, and Seattle. Estimates are that 2,000 coyotes are on self-appointed “rat patrol” in the Chicago metropolitan area.

At least 19 subspecies of coyote roam North and Central America, from California to Newfoundland and Alaska to Panama, occupying a broad range of habitats. Coyotes play an important ecological role helping to maintain healthy ecosystems and species diversity. As the top carnivore in some ecosystems, coyotes help regulate the number of mesocarnivores (such as skunks, raccoons, and foxes) which helps to boost biodiversity.

Life history: Coyotes may live as solitary individuals, in pairs, or in small family groups, both in rural and urban areas. Coyotes are generally monogamous, with pair bonds frequently lasting for many years, and some for life. Both male and female coyotes actively maintain territories that may vary in size from 2 to 30 square miles. Reproduction is generally once per year and limited to the group’s leaders, while other females remain behaviorally sterile. Breeding season peaks in mid-February, followed by 4-8 pups born in a den in April or May. Pup mortality is high, with an average of 50-70% dying within their first year. Some juveniles disperse in late fall to seek new territory, and some individuals remain with their parents and form the basis of the pack.

Habits: In rural habitats, coyotes hunt by day and night. In urban areas, coyotes appear to be more nocturnal but can often be seen during daylight hours, especially at dawn and dusk. They communicate by vocalizing, scent marking and through a variety of body displays. It is common to hear them howling and yipping at night, or even during the day in response to sirens and other loud noises. Indeed, the coyote’s scientific name is Canis latrans which means “barking dog.” With approximately a dozen different vocalizations, it is common to mistake a few coyotes communicating with each other for a large group. Coyotes are fast and agile; they can run at speeds of 25-40 mph (40 km/h) and jump 6 feet. Coyotes are also highly intelligent and social animals; they learn quickly and are devoted parents.

If coyotes are left to self-regulate, generally one litter of pups per year are born with 30-50% of pups surviving.

Coyote Life Cycle

- Dec-Jan-Feb: Breeding Activity
- Feb-March-April: Den Site Selection
- Apr-May: Birthing
- May-June-July: Raising Pups
- July-Aug-Sept-Oct: Expanding home range
- Oct-Dec: Dispersal of pups

Food: Coyotes eat a wide variety of food, and like most animals, prefer food that is easiest to obtain. They are true omnivores, and will eat a wide variety of foods, including rodents, rabbits, insects, lizards, snakes, vegetables, and fruits. They will also take advantage of unsecured garbage and pet food left outdoors. As scavengers, they provide an ecological service by helping to keep our communities clean of carrion. In suburbia, coyotes have been known to take smaller pets if left unattended. Animal guardians are advised to keep cats indoors, and dogs under control during the days and nights at indoor.

About Project Coyote

Project Coyote is a sponsored project of Earth Island Institute, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that supports solutions to protect our shared planet. Project Coyote will not share your personal information with any outside organization.

Keeping Domestic Animals Safe

Although free roaming pets are more likely to be killed by automobiles than by wild animals, coyotes may view cats and small dogs as potential prey and larger dogs as competition. Other domestic animals including sheep, chickens and rabbits may also be seen as food and must be protected. Consider the following:

- Don’t let domestic animals roam; keep them securely enclosed and protected at night.
- Fence your property. The fence must be at least 6 feet tall with the bottom extending at least 6 inches below the ground. Fences are more effective by using wire mesh, outwardly invert the top of the fence, by using electric fencing along the top and bottom (more strands for protecting livestock), or by installing the CoyoteRoller™ which makes it difficult for predators to gain the “foothold” they need to pull up and over the top of an enclosure (see: www.coyoteroller.com).
- Llamas, donkeys, and livestock guard dogs are effective in reducing coyote-livestock conflicts.
- Don’t save animal foods outside; keep all food well secured.
- Install motion-sensor lights near buildings.
- Walk dogs on leashes, particularly during coyote mating and pupping seasons (see chart).
- Spay or neuter your dogs. Though uncommon, coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, dogs.

Livestock guard animals can effectively reduce or eliminate coyote conflicts on farms and ranches.

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Coyote Core Characteristics

- Canis latrans
- Weighs 18-30 pounds (8-14 kg)
- Tail that is usually carried pointed down
- Ears. Coyotes have a long, bushy, black-tipped tail and pointy, erect ears. Coyote ears are that 2,000 coyotes are on self-appointed “rat patrol” in the Chicago metropolitan area.

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Living in the Urban West

Coyotes in the Urban West

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