



WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT QUICK REFERENCE SERIES: **COYOTES**



BILL JONES PHOTO

Coyotes IN THE Suburbs

COYOTES, ONCE LIMITED to the prairies of central North America, are now common in suburban and urban areas across the country.

Neighborhood and city residents not used to being around these animals often have questions about how to deal with them. A basic understanding of the behavior of coyotes – and following some simple guidelines – can help reduce conflicts with these wild animals.

Coyote sightings increase during certain times of the year. Coyotes roam more as breeding season begins in January and February. Their visibility continues into July as they care for their new pups. Sightings pick up again in the fall, when juveniles disperse to find their own territories.

Coyotes may be less tolerant of people around their dens while they are raising pups, especially when someone gets too close. Coyotes are adaptable animals that

How to avoid conflicts with your new neighbors

can use a variety of dens. Sites can include hollow trees or logs, rock crevices, brush piles, abandoned groundhog burrows, self-excavated holes, abandoned buildings or junk piles.

Total eradication of coyotes is not possible. Trapping and removing coyotes will only result in new coyotes moving in to occupy empty territories. Efforts to eradicate coyotes can actually increase their numbers: females may breed at younger ages and give birth to larger litters. The survival rate of pups may increase due to less competition for food.

Fortunately, coyotes typically avoid humans – unless people create situations that attract animals to their homes. Communities must work together to maintain the natural fear that coyotes have of humans and create an environment where coyotes and humans can better co-exist.

The number one rule for dealing with coyotes is not to feed them or provide them with a food source. Discourage your neighbors from feeding coyotes or leaving food out for feral cats or other wildlife.

Coyotes fed by people may lose their natural fear of humans and become aggressive. Nature already provides plenty of food for these omnivorous animals. A coyote's buffet may include mice, rabbits, frogs, insects, carrion, goose eggs and fruit. A coyote in search of an easy meal may also take advantage of dog food left on the porch, unsecured garbage and garden fruits such as watermelon and strawberries. ■



PHOTO COURTESY LAUREN GERMOND

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE:

DON'T PANIC. Coyotes are curious and sometimes follow people to see what they are doing in their territories.

DON'T APPROACH a coyote to take photographs or video.

DON'T TURN YOUR BACK.

DON'T RUN. Running away dampens the coyote's fear of people; it also could trigger its chase instinct.

DON'T HAZE a coyote that is cornered, with pups, or appears sick or injured. Slowly back away.

What should you do if a coyote approaches you?

- Try to scare it away immediately. Don't stand and watch it.
- Shout, whistle, clap your hands, stomp your feet and make some loud noise.
- Wave your arms, widen your stance or wave a walking stick – anything to make you look bigger.
- Establish dominance: Take a step or lunge toward the coyote. Throw a rock or stick in its direction, but not directly at it.
- Pick up small dogs and children.
- Keep scaring the coyote until it's out of sight.
- Coyotes will protect their pups, so stay away from dens. If you suspect a den is nearby, slowly back away from the area.
- Share these solutions with neighbors so everyone works together.

Additional tips to avoid problems with coyotes include:

- Do not leave pet food outside. If you have to feed your pet outside only give them the amount of food they can eat in one sitting.
- Bring bird feeders inside at night and remove the seed that falls on the ground. Bird feeders attract squirrels, mice, raccoons and opossums, which in turn attracts coyotes. Don't hang any feeders when coyotes are in the area.
- Secure garbage containers and compost bins.
- Fence gardens and compost piles.
- Keep BBQ grills clean, including the grease trap.
- Supervise pets while they are in the yard as coyotes can climb over or dig beneath most fencing. Consider kenneling unattended dogs.
- Plug holes under fences and block access to crawlspaces under sheds, out buildings, porches and houses.
- Keep cats inside.
- Install motion-sensitive lighting around the house, or turn on outside lighting and check the yard for unwanted animals before letting a dog outside at night. Consider leashing your dog if coyotes are roaming the area. Clean up dog droppings, as they will attract coyotes.
- Walk your dog on a short, non-retractable leash that is highly visible; a coyote is less likely to attack a dog if they see it as part of you. Avoid walking your dog at the same time or on the same route every day, as coyotes learn patterns.
- Don't leave small children unattended. Show kids pictures of coyotes then instruct them to never approach a coyote or run from one. Children should also learn how to scare away coyotes.
- Do not let your dog chase or "play" with a coyote; the coyote will defend itself and your dog may be injured.
- Educate your neighbors about these guidelines. Keeping coyotes wild and wary of humans is a community effort. Go online to www.urbancoyoteresearch.com to learn more.