

## Coyotes in the Community

January 22, 2010

Coyotes, like other wild animals, sometimes come into conflict with humans. Since migrating to Ontario from the west over 100 years ago, coyotes have adapted well to urban environments and can now be found in both rural and urban settings. Changes in land use, agricultural practices, weather and natural food shortages may contribute to increased coyote sightings in your community.

### Responsibility for managing problem wildlife on properties

- Landowners are responsible for managing problem animals on their property. For example, if there are coyote problems on municipal property it is the municipality's responsibility to deal with them.
- The Ministry of Natural Resources helps landowners and municipalities deal with problem wildlife by providing fact sheets, appropriate agency and animal control services referrals, and information necessary to obtain authorizations where required.
- The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act sets out the legal actions property owners can take to deal with problem wildlife. Generally, landowners or their agents may capture, kill, or harass problem wildlife to prevent damage to their property. There is no closed season for coyotes in the majority of southern Ontario.

Homeowners can take steps to ensure coyotes aren't attracted to their property and to keep their pets safe. To reduce the potential for coyote encounters, the [Ministry of Natural Resources](#) has these tips for the public.

### Do not approach or feed coyotes

- Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. However, they are wild animals and should not be approached.
- People should NOT feed coyotes. Feeding them makes the animals less fearful of humans and habituates them to foods provided by humans.
- Aggressive behaviour towards people is unusual for coyotes, but people should always exercise caution around wildlife.

### If you encounter a coyote

- Never attempt to "tame" a coyote.
- Do not turn your back on or run from a coyote. Back away from the coyote while remaining calm.
- Use whistles and personal alarm devices to frighten an approaching or threatening animal.

### Secure garbage and minimize attractants on your property

- Properly store and maintain garbage containers to help prevent coyotes from becoming a problem.
- Place trash bins inside an enclosed structure to discourage the presence of small rodents, which are an important food source for coyotes.
- Put garbage at curbside the morning of the scheduled pickup, rather than the night before.
- Use enclosed composting bins rather than exposed piles. Coyotes are attracted to dog and cat waste as well as products containing meat, milk and eggs.
- Pick ripe fruit from fruit trees and remove fallen fruit from the ground and keep bird feeders from overflowing as coyotes are fond of fruit, nuts, and seeds.

- Protect vegetable gardens with heavy-duty garden fences or place vegetable plants in a greenhouse. Check with your local nursery to see what deterrent products are available.
- Consider eliminating artificial water sources such as koi ponds.
- Keep pet food indoors.

#### **Use deterrents and fences to keep coyotes away from your home and gardens**

- Use motion-sensitive lighting and/or motion-activated sprinkler systems to make your property less attractive to coyotes and other nocturnal wildlife.
- Fence your property or yard. It is recommended the fence be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below the ground and/or a foot outward. A roller system can be attached to the top of the fence, preventing animals from gaining the foothold they need to pull themselves up and over the top of a fence.
- Electric fencing can also help deter coyotes from properties or gardens in some circumstances
- Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes may find cover and small animals to feed upon.
- Close off crawl spaces under porches, decks, and sheds. Coyotes use such areas for denning and raising young.

#### **Keep all pets on leashes or confined to a yard**

- Cats and small dogs may be seen as prey by coyotes, while larger dogs may be injured in a confrontation. To avoid these situations consider the following suggestions:
- Install proper fencing (see above).
- As coyotes are primarily nocturnal, animals should be kept inside at night.
- Keep cats indoors and do not allow pets to roam from home.
- Walk your dog on a leash at all times. If your yard does not have a fence, use a leash while on your property to keep your dog close to you.
- Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, domestic dogs that have not been spayed or neutered.

#### **Prevent predation on livestock**

- Barns or sheds can provide effective protection from coyote predation for livestock that bed inside or nearby at night.
- Guard animals, such as donkeys, llamas and dogs can be a cost-effective way to protect livestock from coyotes. Guard animals will develop a bond with livestock if they are slowly integrated and will aggressively repel predators.
- For more information on preventing livestock predation, please visit the [Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs \(OMAFRA\) website at www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/sheep/predator.html](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/sheep/predator.html).

#### **LEARN MORE**

- To learn more about coyotes, including how to deal with coyote problems, call your [local Ministry of Natural Resources district office](#). If the coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 911.

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## EASTERN COYOTE

February 16, 2010

### GENERAL BIOLOGY

The eastern coyote, found throughout much of Ontario, is a hybrid between the smaller western coyote and the eastern wolf. Adult females weigh an average of 13 to 16 kilograms (kg), while adult males usually range between 16 to 18 kg. The size and weight of coyotes are often over-estimated because of their thick coats and bushy tails.

In protected areas coyotes can live eight to 12 years, but in areas where they are hunted, or in populated areas like southern Ontario where vehicle collisions are common, the average life expectancy is less than five years.

The coyote's basic social unit is a mated pair, and coyote pairs will often mate for life. Coyotes are territorial and territories are generally exclusive of other breeding coyotes. Territory size can range from a few square kilometres where food is abundant to over a hundred where prey is very scarce.

The availability of food affects what coyotes eat, the size of their territory and populations, reproduction and survival rates. It also affects when pups leave their parents and how far they will travel to establish their own territories.

### LIFE CYCLE

Mated pairs usually breed in February, with pups born in April or May. Litters average five or six pups, but can range from two to 10. Both parents share pup-rearing duties, and begin to teach the pups hunting skills when the pups are about eight to 10 weeks old.

Juveniles usually leave their parents' territory during their first autumn or winter to establish their own territory. "Packs" of coyotes are generally an adult breeding pair and their pups from the most recent litter.

### DIET

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and will consume a variety of foods, including meat, carrion (dead animals), fruits and vegetable matter. In winter, their diet consists mainly of rabbits, hares, and deer when deep snow restricts the deer's mobility. In spring, summer and fall, coyotes prey mainly on small mammals (rodents, rabbits, mice and voles) and eat wild berries, birds, amphibians, grasshoppers, and deer fawns.

Because their diet consists mainly of small rodents, coyotes can be very beneficial in controlling pests that may cause damage to crops and orchards. However, livestock such as sheep, lambs, and calves can also be prey to coyotes.

## **HABITAT**

Coyotes are highly adaptable. They are most commonly associated with open, agricultural landscapes interspersed with woodlots and other brushy terrain. However, they also inhabit green spaces and industrial areas within cities.

## **POPULATIONS**

Coyote populations normally fluctuate in response to the abundance or scarcity of food. When food supplies are limited, they experience higher mortality rates and lower reproduction rates. Only 20 to 50 per cent of pups survive their first year. Humans account for most coyote deaths through hunting, trapping, and motor-vehicle accidents.

### **Impact of Harvesting on Populations**

Within each territory, one breeding pair of coyotes produces a single litter of pups each year. These breeding males and females tend to have relatively high survival rates because of their familiarity with their territory and their reduced tendency to "take risks".

Most harvested coyotes are juveniles that have left their parents' territories and are looking for their own territory and mate. Harvest by humans does little to disrupt breeding or reduce coyote numbers from one year to the next. Without a territory, most of the juvenile coyotes harvested would likely have died of other causes in a relatively short period of time anyway.

## **BEHAVIOUR**

Since migrating to Ontario more than 100 years ago, the coyote has adapted well to both rural and urban environments. The eastern coyote is now an integral and permanent part of our diverse landscape, and performs an important role as a top predator in southern Ontario where most other large predators, such as bears and wolves, are no longer present.

Many people hear coyotes without ever seeing them because of their nighttime howls, barks, throat growls and yips. Coyotes howl to broadcast occupancy of their territory and keep members of the family group aware of each other's locations while hunting or traveling alone. Howling may also help coordinate some hunting activities.

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. They have adapted well to living near humans and development. In urban areas coyotes tend to be nocturnal. They typically roam at night looking for food and spend the daylight hours bedded in bushy or wooded areas. Although unusual, coyotes in urban areas may search for food during the day and may prey on small dogs and other pets from yards in residential areas and from green spaces.

It is unusual for coyotes to show no fear of humans. Coyotes displaying no fear of humans or exhibiting aggressive behaviours have likely been habituated to people through direct feeding or indirect feeding, such as leaving attractants like pet food outside near homes. In these situations, this aggressive behaviour tends to be restricted to a single animal or family group, and not the general population.

## LANDOWNER CONFLICTS

Homeowners can take steps to avoid attracting coyotes to their property, keep their pets and livestock safe, and reduce the potential for coyote encounters. For more information on this, see the ministry's [Coyotes in the Community](#) fact sheet.

Under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, landowners are responsible for managing problem coyotes on their property. Those actions can include harassing, capturing and releasing the animal in close proximity to the capture site, or killing it. Landowners may also use agents authorized under the Act or by the ministry to undertake these measures on their behalf. Anyone who kills a coyote in protection of property in Wildlife Management Units 1-42, 46-50 and 53-58 must immediately report it to the local ministry office. Landowners should also check with their municipality regarding firearm discharge bylaws in their area.

When dealing with coyote conflicts, history shows “bounties” or “culls” are not effective. Most coyotes removed under these programs are the easy-to-catch juveniles or transient animals passing through an area, not the breeding adults that are most often the problem. In addition, programs such as “bounties” don’t target the specific animals causing the conflict or problem in specific areas, but rather indiscriminately target all coyotes across a broad region. Bounties – financial incentives to hunt and trap – have been illegal in Ontario since 1972.

Municipalities and counties may say “bounties” when they actually mean paying authorized agents, under an authorization from the Ministry of Natural Resources, to kill problem coyotes. This authorization has conditions on targeting specific problem coyotes such as those that are killing livestock. These authorizations are for relatively short periods and are confined to specific geographic areas where problem coyotes have been identified.

Research also demonstrates that relocating coyotes is not a solution. Coyotes are highly mobile and territorial animals. A relocated coyote usually ends up in a conflict with an older adult, as most areas are already occupied by a dominant pair. Coyotes can also travel hundreds of kilometres to return to their original capture location. As well, relocation increases the potential for spreading disease.

## DISEASES

Coyote diseases or parasites can be a risk to domestic dogs but rarely to humans. Rabies is rare in coyotes in Ontario. Coyotes may actually help to reduce the incidence of rabies in Ontario since they often prey on foxes, a species more likely to carry the disease.

Mange is common in coyote populations in Ontario. Mange is caused by a parasitic mite that burrows into the outer layer of the skin, resulting in extreme irritation. It can result in the death of the animal.

## LEARN MORE

To learn more about coyotes, including how to deal with coyote problems, call your [local Ministry of Natural Resources district office](#). If the coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 911.

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