

# Living with Coyotes

by Ashley Kinney

The coyote is a widespread canine occupying the entire United States, parts of Canada, and South America. Before human intervention and the eradication of other large predators, they only inhabited two-thirds of the Western United States. There are 19 subspecies of *Canis latrans*.

Coyotes weigh between 20-50 pounds, and are similar to a tan-colored Shepherd-type dog. They live in pairs, large packs, or smaller packs. Lone coyotes do exist; they are most often found in heavily hunted populations or when young males leave their pack.

Coyotes are omnivorous by nature; they feed on a wide variety of mammals, carrion, insects, and fruit. Their intelligence and opportunistic feeding habits allow them to survive in many different areas and habitats, but it also puts them in conflict with humans, mainly in agricultural regions, as well as in urban and suburban areas.

Coyotes are drawn to urban and suburban neighborhoods for two reasons: human encroachment into native habitat, and the availability of food.

Historically, society has attempted to solve human/coyote conflicts, whether in agricultural regions and more recently suburban areas, by killing them. Despite years of poisoning, trapping, neck snaring, and shooting this species, there are more of them in North America today than ever before.



Coyote

The coyote's success appears to be directly related in part to lethal attempts to manipulate its population. As with many wild species, populations are naturally regulated by available food and habitat. Lethal control (trapping, shooting, poisoning) can disrupt the packs hierarchy, causing members to disperse, which allows more coyotes to reproduce, and encourages larger litter sizes due to the decreased competition for food and habitat. Lethal control also ensures that only the most resilient ones survive.

Most wild coyotes have a strong fear of humans; however, those that learn to associate humans with food can become habituated. Habituated coyotes are now frequent in suburban areas. They take advantage of the abundant food, water, and shelter. Unsecured garbage, unfenced gardens, and unattended domestic animals become easy prey.

Documented cases of coyotes biting people are *extremely* rare, and in most incidents, associated with people feeding them. Since coyotes by nature are wary of humans, they will avoid them whenever possible. If you encounter a coyote, remember the following: never feed or attempt to tame it, avoid direct eye contact, do not turn your back or run. If followed by a coyote, make loud noises and make yourself look big.

Coyotes are not considered a disease threat. Outbreaks of rabies in coyotes are rare, and they are not commonly implicated in the transmission of the disease to humans or domestic animals.

Here are some helpful tips that help humanely deter coyotes and other wildlife:

- Secure garbage cans by fastening lids with rope, bungee cords or chains. Tie the handle to a stake driven into the ground.
- Put garbage out on the morning of pickup instead of the night before.
- Dispose of especially attractive food wastes, such as meat, cheese, and eggs, by adding a small amount of ammonia to the bag to deter wildlife.



Coyotes

- When composting, use enclosed bins. Avoid adding dog or cat waste and any food that may attract wildlife.
- Outdoor lights triggered by motion sensors can keep coyotes (and other animals) from approaching your house at night.
- Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes find cover and animals to feed on.

Coyotes cannot differentiate between pets and wild prey. To avoid these situations, consider fencing your property or yard. The fence must be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below the ground. Keep animals in at night; coyotes are crepuscular, meaning active during dawn and dusk. Always bring your pet food inside at night. Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, unaltered domestic dogs.

Ninety percent of a coyote's diet consists of rodents; however, they can harm or kill animals kept outside, such as chickens, rabbits, goats and calves. To prevent loss, keep domestic animals in a closed, secure shelter at dawn and dusk when coyotes are most active. Fright devices, such as sirens and sensor lights, may help deter wildlife from approaching domestic animals. The use of guard animals such as llamas, donkeys and special guard dogs, have proved effective in reducing coyote predation of pastured animals.

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