

Living with Coyotes: Training Your Local Coyotes to be Wary of Humans by Candace Hultberg-Bennett

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are the most abundant of medium to large carnivores in the United States, as well as being closely associated with urban areas. Coyote populations expanded from their historic range of the arid central United States to include most of North America. This is due in part to the almost complete extirpation in the lower 48 states of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) at the beginning of the 20th century. Coyotes are also considered to be very adaptable and opportunistic with respect to their food and habitat usage.



Coyotes are a medium-sized carnivore that weigh on average 50 lbs, are up to 50 inches from tip of nose to tail, and stand about 18 inches at the withers. Distinguishing physical characteristics (compared with wolves) include larger pointed ears, a narrow nasal snout, and a black tipped tail that is usually held down when they are moving. Coyotes are most active from early dusk to late dawn.

Coyotes have three main seasons during a year; rearing of young (May-August), dispersal of young (September-December), and courtship and birthing of young (January-April). Coyote dens can be found along riverbanks, well-drained slopes, or under logs or rocks. They are approximately 1-2 feet wide, 1.5 inches tall, and 5-30 feet long. Pups are born in our area usually around April and emerge from the den within a month. Pups will stay with their parents for 9-12 months before dispersing. Depending on food availability and habitat conditions, some pups will stay an additional year.

Coyote conflicts with humans can be frequent due to their association with urban areas and the adjacent

rural belt. From 1960-2006, there have been approximately 140 documented coyote attacks on humans in the United States and Canada. It was not until 2006 that there was a documented attack on humans in Washington. Of those attacks, about half happened during the rearing season (May-August). Other research has suggested that coyote attacks were also associated with unleashed dogs.

The best way to coexist with local coyotes is to "train" them to avoid humans and residential areas.

In order to safeguard yourself, your family, and your pets, there are several things that you can do.

- At home: do not feed pets outside, keep pets indoors from 6:00pm to 8:00am, clean-up around bird feeders, fruit trees, and compost bins; keep garbage inaccessible, use motion detecting lights, and install 6 ft fences with coyote rollers or angled tops.
- While out on the trails: keep dogs leashed at all times, keep children under supervision and close, avoid the den area (1/4 mile radius or more), and carry a wooden clapper (2 pieces of 1" x 4" wood, each 12 inches long and joined together by a hinge at one end), a stick, or trekking poles.
- Some indicators of a coyote and potential den site include; a congregation of scat in one area along the trail, urine covered scat, or scratching on the ground.
- If you do encounter an aggressive and barking coyote; wave your arms, shout, kick dirt and rocks, or bang a wooden clapper. ***Do not turn around and run. Back away, and keep your dog under control.***

If you can train the coyotes in your area to be wary of humans, you are more likely to be able to coexist with this urban carnivore.

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