

Wildlife Services

Protecting People Protecting Agriculture Protecting Wildlife

Factsheet

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Coyotes in Towns and Suburbs



Wildlife Services (WS), a program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

As coyotes have become more common in urban and suburban settings, WS has received increased calls in every State to address coyote-related damage. Often the damage is linked to human activity that attracts the animals. WS can assist with problems using an integrated approach.

Historically, coyotes were most commonly found on the Great Plains of North America. Their range now extends from Central America to the Arctic. Except for Hawaii, coyotes live in all of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. More coyotes exist today than when the U.S. Constitution was signed.

Almost no animal in America is more adaptable to changing conditions than the coyote. Coyotes can live just about anywhere. They are found in deserts, swamps, tundra, grasslands, brush, and dense forests, from below sea level to high mountains. They have also learned to live in suburbs and cities like Denver, Los Angeles, New York, and Phoenix.

One of the keys to the coyote's success is its diet. A true scavenger, the coyote will eat just about anything. Identified as a killer of sheep, poultry, and deer, the coyote will also eat snakes and foxes, doughnuts and sandwiches, rodents and rabbits, fruits and vegetables, birds, frogs, grass and grasshoppers, pet cats and cat food, pet dogs and dog food, carrion, and just plain garbage.

Coyotes are active mainly during the night, but they can also move about during the day. Most sightings of coyotes occur during the hours close to sunrise and sunset.

Adult coyotes weigh between 20 and 45 pounds. Females are generally smaller than males, and western coyotes are generally smaller than eastern coyotes.

Coyotes look like small collie dogs. They have erect pointed ears, slender muzzle, and a bushy tail. Most coyotes are brownish gray in color with a light gray to cream-colored belly. However, a coyote's color varies and may be somewhat darker or lighter depending upon the geographic region and the time of year. Most coyotes have dark or black hairs over their back and tail.

Coyotes quickly learn not to fear humans and develop a dependency on easy food sources.



A high reproductive rate and the rapid growth of its offspring also aid in the coyote's success. Coyotes breed in February and March, and pups are born about 60 days later. During this time, territorial male coyotes do not tolerate other canines in their territory; many conflicts between coyotes and domestic dogs result from this territorial behavior. An average coyote litter contains four or five pups, born in dens. In urban environments, dens can be in storm drains, under storage sheds, in holes dug in vacant lots, parks, or golf courses, or any other dark, dry place.

Coyote pups are cared for, fed, and protected by both parents. The pups mature quickly and can eat meat and move about well by the time they are a month old. By 6 months, pups have permanent teeth and are taught to hunt for food. During this time of pup rearing, the amount of food that coyotes hunt and eat increase significantly. As a result, conflicts between coyotes and humans are common. It is not unusual to observe a family of coyotes traveling through urbanized areas such as parks or golf courses. If food is deliberately or inadvertently provided by people, the pups quickly learn not to fear humans and develop a dependency on easy food sources.

The pups are fully independent at about 9 months, and they disperse. During the next year, these young adults may be seen as nuisances in urban/suburban areas while they seek safe living areas away from established coyote territories. A few pups may stay with the parents, forming family groups as population densities increase or where food is abundant, such as in urbanized areas. Coyotes adapting to an urban environment can become bolder because they are less likely to be harmed and more likely to associate people with an easy and dependable food source.

Urban Area Coyote

Coyotes have learned that small dogs and cats are easy prey. Newspapers across the country have carried stories of coyotes harassing leashed dogs on

walks with their owners in and near parks and golf courses within city limits. Calls to WS for help or information about urban coyotes often pertain to the animals attacking pets, eating garbage, or simply coming too close to houses or people on foot.

Remember, all wild animals are unpredictable and caution is the watchword when they are around. Don't ever put food out to lure them closer. Nearly all wild animal bites occur when people attempt to feed wildlife or treat them like domestic animals.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce the chance of human-coyote conflicts:

- Do not feed coyotes!
- Eliminate sources of water, particularly in dry climates.
- Bird feeders should be positioned so that coyotes cannot get feed. Coyotes are attracted by bread, table scraps, and even seed. They may also be attracted by the birds and rodents that come to feeders.
- Do not discard edible garbage where coyotes can get to it.
- Secure garbage containers and eliminate garbage odors.
- Feed pets indoors whenever possible. Pick up any leftovers if feeding outdoors. Store pet and livestock feed where it is inaccessible to wildlife.
- Trim and clean, near ground level, any shrubbery that provides hiding cover for coyotes or prey.
- Fencing your yard could deter coyotes. The fence should be at least 6 feet high with the bottom extending at least 6 inches below ground level for best results.
- Don't leave small children unattended outside if coyotes have been frequenting the area.
- Don't allow pets to run free. Keep them safely confined and provide secure nighttime housing for them. Walk your dog on a leash and accompany your pet outside, especially at night. Provide secure shelters for poultry, rabbits, and other vulnerable animals.

- Discourage coyotes from frequenting your area. If you start seeing coyotes around your home or property, chase them away by shouting, making loud noises, or throwing rocks.

These steps may decrease the frequency of coyote sightings in your area if practiced continuously. However, coyotes are adaptable to change and are quick to learn new ways of survival. Occasional sightings most likely will continue. By making life for coyotes in your neighborhood more difficult, you will increase the likelihood that they will go somewhere else.

Suburban/Semi-rural

“Hobby farms” and “ranchettes” are more common today than ever before. Many Americans are enjoying a return to the rural lifestyle, living on a few acres and keeping poultry, horses, and other livestock. Many of these new “farmers” and “ranchers” are shocked to discover that coyotes kill and eat pets, poultry, and stock.

WS suggests (and offers technical assistance for) the following nonlethal methods to reduce coyote damage:

- Use net-wire or electric fencing to keep coyotes away from livestock.
- Shorten the length of calving or lambing seasons.
- Confine livestock in a coyote-proof corral at night when coyotes are most likely to attack livestock.
- Use lights above corrals.
- Remove dead livestock so coyotes won't be attracted to scavenge.
- Remove habitats that provide homes to natural prey of coyotes, like rabbits, from lambing and calving areas.
- Use strobe lights and sirens to scare coyotes away.
- Use guard animals, such as dogs, donkeys, and llamas, to protect livestock.

Additional Information

For more information about this and other WS programs contact your WS State office at 1-866-4-USD-WS (1-866-487-3297) or visit www.aphis.usda/wildlife_damage. WS is not the sole source for wildlife damage management services; these services may be available from private sector providers.



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Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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