

Information Sheet: Urban Coyotes



Coyotes are native to the Midwestern prairies and have always been found in the Front Range of Colorado. Their intelligence and adaptability make them one of the few species that has been able to successfully expand its range, even as natural areas and other animal species decline in numbers. They can now be found in every major ecosystem in North America, including many cities, where living with them has become an issue for residents. with coyotes is an issue in many cities.

With rapid expansion and development in the past 20-30 years, the size and diversity of different animal populations has shifted. Many animals cannot thrive in close proximity to people, and are no longer found in areas that have become urbanized. Other animals have learned to adapt, developing a new urban ecosystem. These adaptable, urban animals have had multiple generations of offspring born in cities—people, denser neighborhoods, pets, cars and more are a normal part of their lives. An urban coyote has a completely different lifestyle than a coyote living in rural areas, and has been raised by its family to survive in cities.

About Coyotes

An urban coyote's diet generally consists of approx. 40% rodents, 20% fruit and the rest a combination of scavenged food and other small animals. They range in size from 20 to 40 pounds and live in family groups with only one pair of coyotes breeding per family, once a year.

In the Front Range, breeding season occurs in the winter (January/February) with pups born April-May. The family group is very protective of puppies, and they have a high success rate. Litter sizes are dependent on the amount of resources available and the number of coyotes in the family group.

Problem

Coyotes in an urban environment easily become used to (habituation) living near people, which changes their behavior. Urban coyotes associate people with food, which reduces their natural wariness in their interactions with people and pets. Every time a coyote sees a person and nothing happens, it increases their boldness and comfort in increasingly close interactions.

Feeding coyotes, either on purpose or accidentally, is the biggest culprit in creating problems.

Wild animals take food where they can. When people feed wildlife, it turns humans into a source for food, and will increase ANY wild animals' boldness towards people. With habituation, we see increases in coyotes entering yards, attacking pets (for both a food source and to defend territory), and initiating contact with both people and pets.

The population size of any species is directly related to the amount of resources available to them. If resource availability does not change and animals are removed, wildlife populations will rapidly return or increase in size.

Safety

Although coyotes are naturally curious, they are also timid and will normally run away if confronted, making attacks on humans are rare. In most cases, attacks occur because of people feeding coyotes or habituating them in some manner. A coyote that associates humans with food may become demanding and aggressive. By feeding coyotes, you put yourself, neighborhood, pets and wildlife at risk. It is unlawful to feed or intentionally attract coyotes in most urban areas.

Discourage a coyote from approaching by:

- Making yourself big and loud
- Waving your arms, clap your hands and throw objects (if available) at the coyote
- Shouting with a loud and authoritative voice

Do not run or turn your back on a coyote, face the coyote and back away slowly

DO:

1. Teach children not to approach or feed any unknown animals
2. Make sure you can identify a coyote. Brownish-gray with light gray to reddish cream colored belly. Look for long legs, pointed nose and ears, bushy tail with black tip.
3. Pick up small children if a coyote is nearby.

While people are rarely in danger, coyotes can and do target pets as both competition and potential food sources. Human pets are often not adapted to protect themselves from wild animals and can be much easier targets than normal prey. Making educated management decisions about pets is the best way to protect them.

Actions

1. CPW (state wildlife agency) has the final say on the lethal action, or killing of coyotes. It has been proven to be a short term solution with long term problems. When territory is vacated, coyotes are attracted to it, and coyote litters will increase in size to fill the territory (a single coyote can have up to 12 pups). Removing the pack leaders can lead to multiple packs forming, with more females able to breed. There often can be increases in the overall size of the local population, increased fighting for territory rights, and higher numbers of young animals causing problems in the community. This option is only considered if a human is bitten or attacked by a coyote.
2. Relocation has been proven to be completely unsuccessful with coyotes. They are notoriously difficult to trap, and will return to the area if at all possible (traveling huge distances). If it cannot return it will usually die fairly quickly. Additionally, it is illegal in the state of CO to relocate urban coyotes.
3. Exclusion techniques or techniques to both remove attractants to coyotes and to discourage coyotes from entering unsuitable locations, is currently the most successful tool in reducing coyote problems and populations in cities. It must be conducted on a community wide level to see large improvements, but even individual efforts can “teach” local coyotes which yards, parks, and people to avoid. Long term reduction in food sources for coyotes is the most effective means to reduce population size.
4. Hazing coyotes has proven to be the most effective method for instilling the healthy and natural fear of humans back into the coyotes. Coyotes are quick learners and consistent negative experiences can teach them to avoid people.

The Parks and Recreation Department/Natural Resources, in partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife encourage residents and city staff to use exclusion techniques on coyotes.

Exclusion Techniques

This is not a quick, short term process. Relate this to never saying no to a child. The first time they hear it they won't understand or believe it. Consistency over time is the most effective means to establishing appropriate human/coyote interactions.

1. Individuals and groups of people responding (hazing) whenever they see a coyote. Yelling, waving arms, acting aggressively, spraying with hoses, using noisemakers, vinegar water squirt guns will all make a coyote uncomfortable around people. Haze **UNTIL THE ANIMAL LEAVES**.
2. **Never** ignore, or turn your back on a coyote. Watch and walk away slowly.
3. **Never** allow a coyote between you and a pet or child. A coyote will not want to get involved with a person.
4. **Remove all human sources of food**. Keep trash and compost inaccessible. Pick up fallen fruit in yards. Clean out under bird feeders.
5. Do not let cats run freely in neighborhoods. Supervise small dogs and/or children when outside. Keep all pets inside at night (or in a completely enclosed kennel) when coyotes are most active.
6. Maintain fences so coyotes cannot slip underneath. Add deterrents to the tops of fences that reduce a coyote's ability to grab on and pull themselves up and over. Coyote rollers and wire extensions can discourage animals attempting to breach fences.
7. Install motion activated lights in back yard. Keep lights on when dogs are outside.
8. Visually inspect yard before allowing any pet outside.

9. Communicate with local officials. **Report the following (include the date and location of incident):**
- a. Coyote biting or attacking a person.
 - b. Coyote attacking a dog.
 - c. Person feeding coyote, either accidentally or purposefully.

Denver Parks & Recreation/Natural Resources Operations
Wildlife Hotline: 720-913-0630 or call 311.