

# WILDLIFE CARE OF VENTURA COUNTY

[www.Wildlifecareofventura.org](http://www.Wildlifecareofventura.org)

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## Adapting our Behavior...

In a wild animal's world which is fast becoming part of our urban one, what our human instincts direct us to do is not always in the best interest of the animal... and in some situations compromises our safety with in our own backyards.

## It's all about territory, boundaries and behavior ...

Coyotes have always been living amongst us, they are timid animals by nature and most often choose to be elusive and unseen, moving around under the cover of darkness or on a rare occasion allowing us a glimpse of them from far off in the distance.

Times have changed and we have extended our territories to include their distant backyards and they have adapted to our presence and are becoming desensitized to our daily activities. In essence some of them are losing their fear of people. Coyotes are not going away in fact they are thriving in the midst of urban developments ...and in spite of them. Urban developments have much to offer the coyote in the way of agriculture, insects, rodents, trash ,carriion, wild rabbits, gophers, squirrels, small pets... and no predators.

Intentionally or unintentionally having food available for these animals combined with our lack of knowledge on how to respond to a coyote's presence when they do enter our yards or territory whether we are living in a wildlife area, corridor, foothill, suburb or the city, in essence what we are doing is conditioning or training that animal that it is safe and they have no need to fear us.

We need to educate ourselves on how to deal with these encounters and empower ourselves to take back our yards and communicate this to the coyote... in a language he will understand.

## Living with Coyotes

### It's all about Territories - Boundaries - and Behavior

It's not a question of do you have Coyotes in your area, the question is how are they behaving? Coyotes are everywhere, surviving in the hills, foothills, suburbs and inner city, most of us in the areas where the coyote has maintained his fear of people do not see them. They choose to travel under the cover of darkness. They come in and feed on the wild rabbits, rodents and squirrels that also have found suburbs a delectable smorgasbord, We hear the coyotes calling to one another - and if we do see them in the very early morning, they are on the move to get out of our space and back to theirs. Which is normal and fine. They are keeping our rodent populations in check ...as long as we are not supplying them with something easier to dine on.

**The problem** arises when they lose their fear of people and their behavior and habits change.

- Do you see them in your yard during the middle of the day
- Do they stand their ground if approached
- Do they approach you

If the answer was yes to any of these questions, the coyotes in your area are displaying behaviors that could escalate and become a problem. The time to act is NOW. Behavioral problems are easier to avoid with a little education on prevention than they are to correct once a behavior pattern has been established. The solution is to be aware and recognize these signs and changing behaviors as they are occurring, before they escalate into a problem - for people and the coyote.

**Problem or Habituated Wildlife can not be rehabilitated or relocated, they are euthanized.**

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## **Pro Active Animal Proofing:**

This is the preferred method of wildlife "control." Unlike trapping and the use of poisons, animal proofing is a safe and effective solution to human/wildlife conflicts. And it teaches the animals in your area boundaries, which to avoid. By eliminating the attractions that bring the animals to your home in the first place and by your own behavior you can condition the animals to stay away. This is especially true starting in February when coyotes are searching out denning sites.

## **Identify what is attracting the animal to the property:**

Usually it is a multitude of factors, so make sure all are corrected at the same time.

## **Food, Water + Shelter**

## **Never feed coyotes:**

Coyotes that are fed by people will lose their fear of humans and develop a territorial attitude that may lead to aggressive behavior.

## **Feed dogs and cats indoors:**

If you must feed your pets outside, do so in the morning or midday. Pick up any remaining food, and water bowls.

## **Fruit Trees + Bird Feeders:**

Pick up fallen fruit off the ground, Vegetable gardens should be protected with heavy duty garden fences or be enclosed by a greenhouse, do not feed the birds or other wildlife. Coyote's will eat bird food and are attracted to the many birds and rodents that come to feeders. Eliminate artificial water sources and koi ponds.

## **Keep dogs and cats indoors:**

Especially from dusk to dawn. When taking them out, have them on a leash, small dogs will charge coyotes to protect their territory. Pets are easy prey for coyotes. If you suspect losing a dog or cat to a coyote, notify your neighbors. Once a coyote finds easy prey it will continually hunt in the area. If you see "Missing Cat" signs posted in your area, chances are there are coyotes in the area. Secure chicken coops or

small animal pens with wire tops and underground wire bottoms to prevent digging under.

## **Don't feed feral cats:**

Coyotes prey on these cats as well as any feed you leave out for the feral cats. Prevent the buildup of feeder foods under bird feeders.

## **Don't leave small children unattended where coyotes are frequently seen:**

Coyotes **do not** eat children, but children are small and not as intimidating and they usually smell like food, so a habituated coyote may approach and nip. Coyotes are wild canines and have the same behaviors as our domestics do. Only they need and use those behaviors to survive.

If there are coyote sightings in your area, prepare your children for a possible encounter. Explain the reasons why coyotes live there (habitat / food source/ species adaptability) and what they should do if one approaches them (don't run, be as big, mean, and loud as possible). **By shouting a set phrase such as "go away coyote"** when they encounter one, children will inform nearby adults of the coyote's presence as opposed to a general scream. Demonstrate and rehearse encounter behavior with the children. Keep deterrents in their play area in times of increased sightings. An old hockey stick, broom, a can filled with stones (to shake + throw) or a pile of stones near the play area can help prepare children for an encounter and will remind them of effective encounter behavior.

## **Modify the landscape around your home:**

Shrubs and trees should be pruned several feet above ground level so coyotes can't hide in them. Coyotes can climb fruit trees. Close off passages to areas beneath porches, attics, cellars or other crawl spaces with heavy-duty wire mesh. Remove unnecessary outdoor debris such as overgrown grass areas, woodpiles, fallen fruit and secure trash lids.

## **Build a coyote-proof fence:**

Coyotes don't leap fences in a single bound but, like domestic dogs, they grip the top with their front paws and kick themselves upward and over with the back legs. All coyotes are excellent diggers, and an effective fence needs to extend at least 8 inches below the surface.

Adapted from "Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest" (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>)

## **Be Prepared ...**

Coyotes are very timid, spook easy and are very sound sensitive so keep noisemaking and other scare devices nearby. They also become desensitized quickly to repetitiveness, so be prepared to mix it up with various tactics.

- An air horn (used at ball games),
- Vinegar-filled "Super-Soaker",
- Powerful spray of water from a hose.
- Construct a "clapper", take 2 pieces of wood and clap together,
- A small can filled with small pebbles or nails, and shake, (Tape the lid on so it can be thrown)
- Pepper spray.

## **During the daylight hours:**

If a coyote approaches too closely, pick up small children or pets immediately to appear larger than you are and act aggressively toward the animal; wave your arms, throw stones, and shout at the coyote. Make yourself appear larger by standing up (if sitting), or stepping up onto a rock, stump, table or stair. Gather surrounding people together to make an even larger group.

## **The idea is to convince the coyote that you are to be feared and a potential predator:**

Do not corner him, as a cornered wild animal will be more aggressive. Always allow him an escape route. It's very important that you continue your loud, wild and crazy behavior until you get the proper response from the coyote which is a "Hasty Retreat" You have just reclaimed your territory, and the coyote maintains his fear of people.