

# Coyotes

## The Coyote Food and Feeding Habits

- Coyotes are opportunists, both as hunters and as scavengers. They eat any small animal they can capture, including mice, rats, gophers, mountain beavers, rabbits, and squirrels, also snakes, lizards, frogs, fish, birds, and carrion (animal carcasses) small pets, Grass, fruits, and berries are eaten during summer and fall.
- Grasshoppers and other insects are important to juvenile coyotes learning the stalk-and pounce method of hunting.
- Pairs of coyotes or family groups using the relay method pursue small deer and antelope. These mammals are important food in winter; fawns may be eaten in spring.
- Coyotes eat wild species, but they are known to eat pet food, garbage, garden crops, livestock, poultry, and pets (mostly cats). If they are available
- Coyotes occasionally kill domestic dogs (and foxes) that they consider territorial intruders. Coyotes are also very protective of their young and will attack dogs that get too close to their den and pups.
- **Note: The list of killers of domestic cats and dogs includes other dogs and cats, vehicles, bears, cougars, disease, and furious neighbors!**

**Most hunting activity takes place at night. Undisturbed hungry coyotes and coyotes that are desensitized to human activity within the city will hunt during daylight hours, catching rabbits, voles and other small prey including cats and small pets if encountered.**

## Den Sites

- The female coyote digs her own den under an uprooted tree, log, or thicket; may use a cave, hollow log, or storm drain; or take over and enlarge another mammal's burrow.
- The den will have an entrance 1 to 2 feet across, be dug 5 to 15 feet long, and terminate in an enlarged nesting chamber.
- Coyotes usually have several dens and move from one to the other, minimizing the risk that a den containing young will be detected. These moves also help to prevent an accumulation of fleas and other parasites, as well as urine, droppings, and food refuse.
- Coyotes use the same dens yearly or make new dens in the same area.



**Figure 2.** Juvenile coyotes are often heard in summer, trying out their voices. (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.)

## Reproduction and Family Structure

- Occasionally, a mated pair of coyotes will live, hunt, and raise pups together for many years, sometimes for life.
- Breeding occurs in late winter. After a gestation (pregnancy) of 63 days, an average of four pups are born from early April to late May. (Litter size can be affected by population density and food availability.)
- The young are principally cared for by the female; occasionally a non breeding sibling will assist with raising the litter. The male provides some

- Pups emerge from the den in two to three weeks and begin to eat regurgitated food. Because food requirements increase dramatically during pup rearing, this is a period when conflicts between humans and coyotes are common.
- Juvenile coyotes usually disperse alone or sometimes in groups at six to eight months of age. A few may stay nearby, while others seek new territory up to 50 miles away. The greater the amount of food available in a given area, the closer the juveniles will stay to their den.
- Coyotes can interbreed with domestic dogs; however, such crosses are rare.

## Mortality and Longevity

- Coyote numbers are controlled by social stress, diseases, parasites, competition for food, and predators.
- Predators include humans, cougars, bears, and other coyotes. Eagles, dogs, and adult coyotes kill some coyote pups.
- **Where coyotes are hunted and trapped, females produce more pups per litter than in areas where they are protected.**
- Coyotes in captivity live as long as 18 years. In the wild, few coyotes live more than four years; the majority of pups die during their first year.

## Where and When to See Coyotes

Normal wild Coyotes are extremely wary. Their sense of smell is remarkable, and their senses of sight and hearing are exceptionally well developed. If you see a coyote out during the day then you can be pretty sure that he is not threatened by your presence, because if he was he would be hiding.

Sightings of coyotes are most likely during the hours just after sunset and before sunrise. Coyotes frequent well-used trails, A coyote will often come down the trail the same time every morning or evening..

Never approach an occupied coyote den. A mother's protective instincts can make her dangerous if she has young in or nearby the den. **Unfamiliar or new human activity close to the den, especially within one-quarter mile, will often cause coyotes to move, particularly if the pups are older, if the adults see you, or if the den is in an open area with little protective cover.**

## Calls

Coyotes create a variety of vocalizations. Woofs and growls are short-distance threat and alarm calls; barks and bark-howls are long-distance threat and alarm calls; whines are used in greetings; lone and group howls are given between separated group members when food has been found or to locate a member; and a yip-howl is often done when a group reunites.

**Coyotes Too Close for Comfort**

Coyotes are smart, curious but timid animals and will generally run away if challenged. However, city Coyotes are becoming desensitized to people and learning that we are not to be feared, but quite the contrary... that we are advantages to them by means of food ,water and shelter. It's up to us to change that behavior in order to protect ourselves ...and the Coyote

During the daylight hours if a coyote ever approaches too closely, pick up small children or pets immediately and act aggressively toward the animal. Wave your arms, throw stones, and shout at the coyote. If necessary, make yourself appear larger by standing up (if sitting) or stepping up onto a rock, stump, or stair. The idea is to convince the coyote that you are not prey, but a potential danger.

Where coyote encounters occur regularly, Coyotes are very sound sensitive so keep noisemaking and other scare devices nearby. They also become desensitized quickly to repetitive tactics, so practice a lot of these measures at the same time or at least mix it up. A starter pistol can be effective; so can a vinegar-filled super soaker or a 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, pepper spray, or paintball gun are powerful deterrents at close range.

If a coyote continues to act in an aggressive or unusual way or does not retreat from these tactics call your local wildlife office .

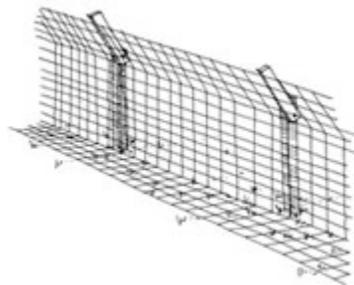
By the same token if the coyote is only passing through and it is after dark, Just leave him alone

## Solutions to Problems

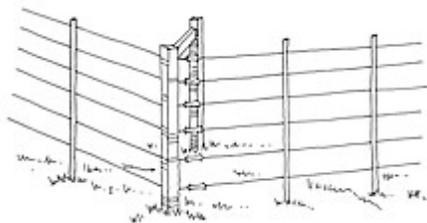
From 1988 to 1997 in southern California, 53 coyote attacks on humans-- resulting in 21 injuries-- were documented by a University of California Wildlife Extension Specialist. A study of those incidents indicated that human behavior contributes to the problem.

**Humans increase the likelihood of conflicts with coyotes by deliberately or inadvertently feeding the animals, whether by handouts or by providing access to food sources such as garbage, pet food or livestock carcasses.** When people provide food, coyotes quickly lose their natural fear of humans and become increasingly aggressive. They also become dependent on the easy food source people provide . Once a coyote stops hunting on its own and loses its fear of people, it becomes dangerous and may attack without warning

**Prevention is the best tool for minimizing conflicts with coyotes and other wildlife.** To prevent conflicts with coyotes, use the following management strategies around your property and encourage your neighbors to do the same.

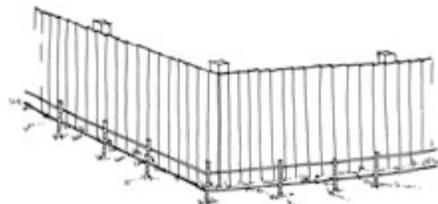


**Figure 6.** Fence extensions are required to keep coyotes from jumping over a 5-foot fence. Angle the top of a woven-wire fence out about 15 inches and completely around the fence. An effective fence extends below the surface, or has a wire apron in front of it to prevent digging.



**Figure 7.** A six-wire electric fence can keep coyotes out of an enclosed area.

(Drawings by Jenifer Rees.)



**Figure 8.** Two electrified wires, 8 and 15 inches above ground and offset from an existing wood fence by 12 inches will prevent coyotes from accessing the fence. A single strand may be sufficient, but two electrified wires will provide added insurance.

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

**heard.** 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.

**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. Try to educate your friends and neighbors about the problems associated with feeding coyotes. If you belong to a homeowner's association or neighborhood watch, bring up the subject during one of the meetings.

**Don't give coyotes access to garbage.** Keep garbage can lids on tight by securing them with rope, chain, bungee cords, or weights. Better yet, buy quality garbage cans with clamps or other mechanisms that hold lids on. To prevent tipping, secure the side handles to metal or wooden stakes driven into the ground. Or keep your cans in tight-fitting bins, a shed, or a garage.

**Prevent access to fruit and compost.** Keep fruit trees fenced, or pick up fruit that falls to the ground. Keep compost piles within a fenced area or securely covered. Cover new compost material with soil or lime to prevent it from smelling. Never include animal matter in your compost; it attracts coyotes. If burying food scraps, cover them with at least 12 inches of soil, and don't leave any garbage above ground in the area—including the stinky shovel. **Feed dogs and cats indoors.** If you must feed your pets outside, do so in the morning or at midday, and pick up food, water bowls, leftovers, and spilled food well before dark every day.

### **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. Coyotes will eat bird food and are attracted to the many birds and rodents that come to feeders.

**Keep dogs and cats indoors, especially from dusk to dawn.** If left outside at night in an unprotected area, cats and small to mid-size dogs may be killed by coyotes. Pets can be easy prey for coyotes. Being raised by humans leaves them unsuspecting once they leave the safety of your home. 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.

**Modify the landscape around children's play areas.** Shrubs and trees should be pruned several feet above ground level so coyotes can't hide in them. Keep deterrents nearby in times of increased sightings. An old hockey stick, broom, or a pile of stones near the play area can help prepare children for an encounter and will remind them of effective encounter behavior.

**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. Their tendency to climb will depend on the individual animal and its motivation. A 5-foot woven-wire fence with extenders facing outward at the top of each post should prevent coyotes from climbing over (Fig. 6).

However, all coyotes are excellent diggers, and an effective fence needs to extend at least 8 inches below the surface, or have a galvanized-wire apron that extends out from the fence at least 15 inches (Fig. 6).

Electric fences can also keep coyotes out of an enclosed area (Figs. 7 and 8). Such a fence doesn't need to be as high as a woven-wire fence because a coyote's first instinct will be to pass through the wires instead of jumping over them. Digging under electric fences usually doesn't occur if the bottom wire is electrified.



**Figure 9.** The Coyote Roller™ prevents coyotes from being able to get the foothold necessary to hoist them over a fence. (From Coyote Roller™)

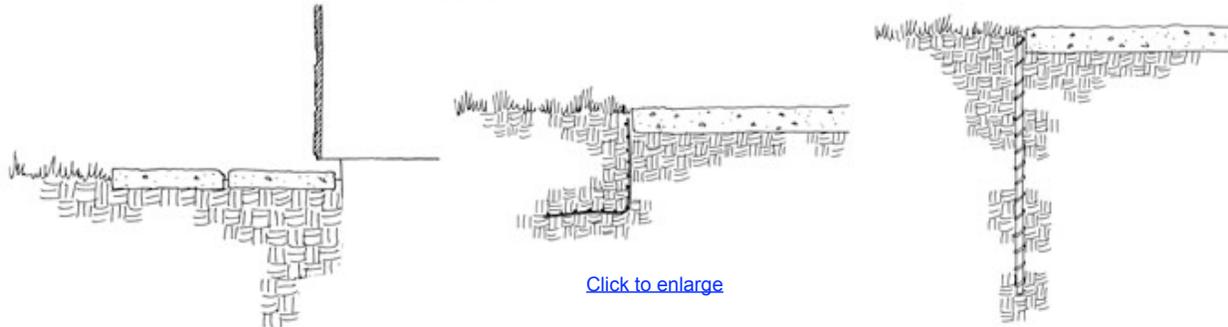
Alternatively, install a commercial device, such as the Coyote Roller™, to prevent coyotes from being able to get the foothold necessary to hoist them over a fence (Fig. 9). (See “[Internet Resources](#)” for additional information.)

**Enclose poultry (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) in a secure outdoor pen and house.** Coyotes will eat poultry and their eggs if they can get to them. **Note:** Other killers of poultry include foxes, skunks, raccoons, feral cats, dogs, bobcats, opossums, weasels, hawks, and owls.

To prevent coyotes from accessing birds in their night roosts, equip poultry houses with well-fitted doors and secure locking mechanisms. To prevent them from trying to go under the fence, stake the bottom of the fence flush to the ground, or line the bottom of the fence with bricks, fence posts, or similar items. For ways to prevent coyotes from digging under a fence or structure see Figure 10.

To prevent coyotes and other animals from accessing poultry during the day, completely enclose outdoor pens with 1-inch chicken wire placed over a sturdy wooden framework.

**Figure 10.** Various ways to install a barrier to prevent coyotes from digging under chicken coops and similar places. To add to the life of the barrier, spray on two coats of rustproof paint before installation. Always check for utility lines before digging in an area. (Drawings by Jenifer Rees.)



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- a.** Lay large flat stones, concrete patio pavers, or 1/4-inch hardware cloth (held in place with stakes) on the surface of the soil next to a wall. The barrier forces coyotes to begin digging farther out and they will most likely give up in the process.
- b.** Bend hardware cloth into an “L” shape and lay it in a trench so that along the side of a wall, and the wire goes at least 1 foot below the ground and 1 foot out from the wall.
- c.** Excavate a 3 x 3 inch trench and hammer 2-foot lengths of 1/2-inch rebar, spaced a few inches apart, into the ground. Cover the tops with concrete or dirt.

### **Keep livestock and small animals that live outdoors confined in secure pens during periods of vulnerability.**

All animals should be confined from dusk to dawn. (Temporary or portable fencing keeps livestock together so that they can be guarded more effectively.) During birthing season, keep young and vulnerable animals confined at all times. Do not use remote pastures or holding areas, especially when there has been a recent coyote attack. Remove any sick and injured animals immediately. Ensure that young animals have a healthy diet so that they are strong and less vulnerable to predators.

Livestock producers have discovered that scare devices, such as motion detectors, radios, and other noise makers, will deter coyotes—until they realize that they aren’t dangerous.

**Note:** Many ranchers now attempt to kill coyotes only when damage has occurred. **If your property is the home territory of coyotes that don’t harm livestock, they will keep away other coyotes that are**

**potential livestock killers. Coyotes also benefit ranchers and other property owners by helping control populations of mice, rats, voles, moles, gophers, rabbits, and hares.**

**Remove or bury dead livestock.** Coyotes, with their keen sense of smell, quickly find dead animals. Cover the carcass with a minimum of 2 feet of soil.

**For a large property with livestock, consider using a guard animal.** There are specialty breeds of dogs that can defend livestock. Donkeys and llamas have also successfully been used as guard animals. As with any guard animal, pros and cons exist. Purchase a guard animal from a reputable breeder who knows the animal he or she sells. Some breeders offer various guarantees on their guard animals, including a replacement if an animal fails to perform as expected.

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