

Coyotes



A DOG may be man's—and woman's—best friend, but we haven't been a friend to most other canine species, especially the coyote (*Canis latrans*). As one of the most persecuted animals in North America, coyotes have been subjected to gun shot, traps, snares, poisons, and just about every other method for killing an animal you can imagine.

But in spite of efforts to exterminate the species, there are more coyotes living in North America today than ever before. These tricksters have outwitted us at every turn, expanding their range and returning to places where

they had been extinguished. Coyotes have even learned to live in close proximity to human beings, within urban and suburban areas, and they are thriving.

Although coyotes are classified as carnivores, they are true omnivores, making use of an amazing variety of foods. In rural habitats, their diet consists mainly of rabbits and rodents supplemented with berries and other plant material. In urban habitats, coyotes will help

themselves to pet food, as well as the pets themselves, garden produce, and food wastes.

Given coyotes' intelligence and adaptability, it's little wonder that conflicts arise with their human neighbors. Luckily for both parties, a little patience and understanding go a long way toward preventing these problems.

People have traditionally addressed conflicts with coyotes by killing the offending animal or—because trapping methods are indiscriminate—any coyote who they could catch. But humane, lasting, and environmentally sound solutions will be achieved only by changing the habits *we* have that invite conflicts with the animals.

People *can* live in harmony and coexist with wildlife—you just have to know your wild neighbors!



Coyote Facts— GEE WHIZ

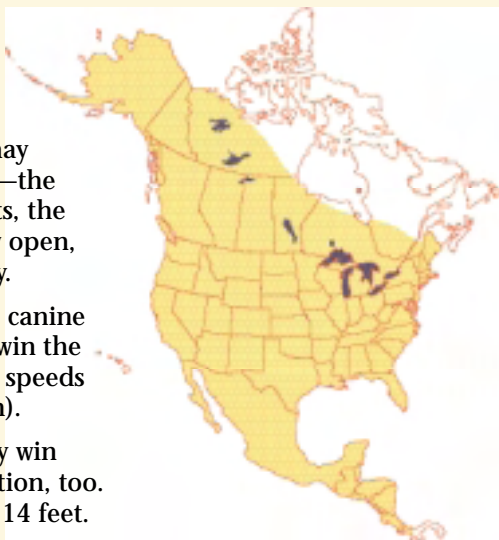
The coyote's scientific name (*Canis latrans*) means "barking dog."

Coyotes and badgers may cooperate to find food—the coyote sniffs out rodents, the badger digs the burrow open, and both share the prey.

In a race among all the canine species, coyotes would win the gold medal, cruising at speeds of 25–30 mph (65 km/h).

Coyotes would probably win the long jump competition, too. They can leap as far as 14 feet.

Coyotes use at least 10 different sounds to communicate, *not* counting their familiar yapping howl.



MAP ADAPTED FROM THE SMITHSONIAN BOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Vital Statistics

Description: The coyote is a member of the dog family. In size and shape coyotes are like medium-sized collie dogs, but their tails are round and bushy and are carried straight out below the level of their backs.

Range and Habitat:

The ubiquitous coyote is found throughout North America from Alaska to New England and south through Mexico to Panama. One of the most adaptable animals in the world, coyotes can change their breeding habits, diet, and social dynamics to survive in a wide variety of habitats.

Diet: Small mammals, insects, reptiles, fruit, and carrion.

Adult Size:

Weight: 15–45 lbs.

Length with tail: 40–60"

Shoulder height: 15–20"

Breeding: The female bears one litter of 3–9 puppies a year, usually in April or May when food is abundant. The gestation period is 63–65 days.

Age When Independent: The pups live and play in the den until they are 6–10 weeks old, when the mother starts taking them out hunting in a group. The family gradually disbands, and by fall the pups are usually hunting alone. Within a year, they go their own ways, staking out their own territories, marked with the scent of their urine.

Call:

Howling: Communication with others in the area. Also, an announcement that "I am here and this is my area. Other males are encouraged to stay away but females are welcome to follow the sound of my voice. Please answer and let me know where you are so we don't have any unwanted conflicts."

Yelping: A celebration or criticism within a small group of coyotes. Often heard during play among pups or young animals.

Barking: Thought to be a threat display when a coyote is protecting a den or a kill.

Huffing: Usually used for calling pups without making a great deal of noise.

Family Life

ALONE coyote howling at the moon has become an icon of the American West, but in reality coyotes are not solitary by nature. They often mate for life and young coyotes will stay with their parents for a year or two if food is plentiful.

Mating occurs in early spring and the female begins to look for a secluded den site. The pups are born two months later and will be nursed for as long as seven weeks. The parents begin to regurgitate solid food for the youngsters when they are about three weeks old. By nine months the pups are fully grown. They reach sexual maturity at one year but may wait until they are two years old to mate.

Coyotes can form packs consisting of a breeding pair and older offspring. Although the family will hunt and guard food cooperatively, coyote packs are less stable than those formed by wolves.



Control a

ALTHOUGH very common in urban and suburban areas, people are less concerned about them than their wilderness counterparts. The most common evidence that they are nearby is their nighttime howling and barks. Unless they are causing a specific problem, the presence of coyotes should not be cause for alarm.

However, coyotes will kill free-roaming pets and have been known to raid gardens and garbage cans. Other wild animals make use of these food sources, too, so if a specific problem exists, you'll want to make sure you identify the culprit before taking steps toward control. Visual identification, tracking, and trapping are out if the culprit is a coyote, and other nontoxic powder

Coyotes and People



WHILE they remain among the most persecuted animals in North America, coyotes also have supporters for their intelligence and adaptability. These animals were highly regarded in the oral traditions of many American Indians, who admired their uncanny ability to flourish in a wide variety of habitats. More contemporary works also shine a positive light on them. J. Frank Dobie published *The Voice of the Coyote* in 1947, a time when it would be hard to imagine anyone having a good thing to say about the animals. This charming book and others reassuringly portray people who understand and accept coyotes for what they are—part of the natural world we *all* inhabit. Coyotes are here to stay; they adapted to us, and now it may be our turn to adapt to them.

Coyote fans may unwittingly create problems for the animals. Feeding or even providing water in dry climates may attract them into areas where they come into conflict

with people and pets. Orphaned coyote pups may seem little different from puppies, and the idea of keeping one as a pet can be hard to resist. But even when raised in captivity, coyotes are *not* appropriate pets. And municipal ordinances and state laws often prohibit keeping them as pets.

Never try to handle an injured, ill, or orphaned coyote on your own. They can be dangerous when threatened, even when weakened by disease or injury. A permitted wildlife rehabilitator can advise you on the best course of action. Check with your local animal control office, humane society, or state wildlife agency to find a rehabilitator in your area. Or visit www.wildlife-international.org for Wildlife International's easy-to-use search engine.



and Damage Prevention

ood at staying hidden, an coyotes often seem about being sighted counterparts. Still, the that coyotes are living chorus of howls, yips,

on hard surfaces to check for footprints.

Most conflicts between humans and coyotes are easily avoided by following these simple suggestions, most of which will help to prevent conflicts with other wild species, as well:



a positive identification and a solution. Other than s are the best way to find te. Flour, cornstarch, ers can be sprinkled

- Don't leave bowls of pet food or water outside overnight.
 - Keep garbage in a sturdy container with a tight-fitting lid.
 - Don't place garbage cans out at the curb until the morning of your scheduled pickup day.
 - Compost in enclosed bins instead of exposed piles.
 - Clean up around bird feeders.
 - Make sure your fences are more than six feet high with no gaps at ground level—coyotes are good diggers.
- While there aren't any repellents registered for use on coyotes, aversion agents used for dogs and cats have been used with some success. Humane trapping and removal should be used only as a last resort. While at first glance removal *seems* to be a quick and easy solution, this approach is likely to have the opposite effect. Coyotes seem to have developed a unique survival strategy—when individuals are removed from a population, there is some evidence that the next year's litter will be larger than normal, so over time there might be more coyotes than before. When it comes to coyotes, an ounce of prevention is worth far more than a pound of cure.
- Keep all pets inside at night and watch small dogs while outside, even during daylight hours.
 - Keep cats indoors.
 - Spay or neuter your dogs.

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The HSUS provides fact sheets on a variety of topics. For additional information contact:

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Consequences of Feeding

PEOPLE rarely intend to feed coyotes, but these animals are opportunistic and they'll make use of any readily accessible supply of food, whether it's in a pet bowl or a trash can. Unfortunately, when coyotes become accustomed to the



sights and sounds of humans they begin to lose their natural fear—a risky proposition for any wild animal. Coyotes will not make a distinction between their “natural” prey and the family cat or small dog, and there are some health concerns for humans and their companion animals (see Health Concerns). The best way to solve wildlife problems is to prevent them—don't let pets run loose and keep anything that could be used as a food source safely stored away. Never feed coyotes!

Health Concerns

Coyotes are susceptible to a number of diseases that can affect humans and their companion animals, including rabies, canine distemper, and canine parvovirus

Rabies

Coyotes are classified as a rabies vector species (RVS), along with raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats, which means they can carry and spread rabies. In spite of all the concern and fear surrounding this disease, advances in public education, pet vaccination, and postexposure treatment have greatly reduced the risk to humans.

Distemper

This disease, which can also affect pets, is similar to rabies but does not pose a threat to humans. Contact your veterinarian to discuss any concerns, and make sure that your pets are vaccinated against distemper and other diseases according to your veterinarian's recommendations.

Canine Parvovirus

“Parvo” is caused by a highly contagious virus primarily transmitted orally through contact with infected feces. Some animals can pick up the disease and shed the virus without showing significant symptoms. The incubation period varies from five to 10 days. Symptoms include lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, and lack of appetite. Ask your veterinarian about preventative vaccinations.

Information on humane prevention of coyote conflicts was prepared by Kieran Lindsey, Natural Assets Consulting, Cedar Crest, New Mexico, and reviewed by Marc Bekoff, Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder.