



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Living with Wildlife: Coyotes

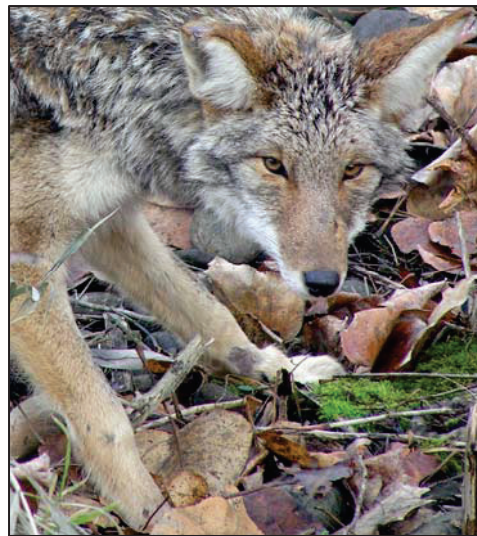
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Coyotes, an icon of the American West, are common in Oregon, where they are widely distributed across the landscape. Coyotes have been romanticized in western novels and movies. They have also been vilified and even persecuted for killing livestock and pets. Aided by their intelligence and adaptability, coyote populations are flourishing, and subject of considerable public interest.

Physical Characteristics

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are members of the dog family. They look like small German shepherd dogs with features that include erect pointed ears, a slender muzzle, and a bushy tail. At the shoulder, adult males are about 25 inches tall. Coyotes generally weigh between 20 and 35 pounds, although in some parts of the country they can get as heavy as 45 pounds. In eastern Oregon, coyotes are mostly tan-brown with streaks of gray and



black. In western Oregon, they tend to be darker with more brown coloration, which blends better with the habitat on the west side of the state. Coyotes have a distinctive voice, consisting of various howls, high-pitched yips and occasional dog-like barks.

Reproduction and Family Structure

Coyotes typically mate in February and give birth to pups 63 days later. Average litters are four pups but can be as high as 11 pups, depending on population density, abundance of food and other factors.

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 are common. Occasionally, a mated pair of coyotes will live, hunt and raise pups together for many years.

Juvenile coyotes learn to hunt by stalking and pouncing on grasshoppers and other insects. Coyotes usually venture out on their own at age six to eight months. Although it usually hunts alone, the coyote occasionally forms packs.

Food and Feeding

Coyotes are skillful predators, with tremendous speed, agility, strength and endurance. They will eat just about anything, including mice, rats, gophers, squirrels, mountain beavers, snakes, lizards, frogs, fish, and birds. By hunting in pairs or family groups, coyotes can also take small deer and antelope. In the summer and fall, coyotes will eat grass, fruits and berries. Coyotes are also known to eat pet food, garbage, garden crops, livestock, poultry and pets.



Coyotes are skilled hunters and will eat rodents, birds, snakes, small deer and antelope, insects, fruits and berries. They are opportunistic feeders and will also eat pets, pet food and garbage.

Ecological Benefits

Coyotes play an important role in the food chain by controlling mice, rats and other rodents and scavenging on dead wildlife that otherwise could spread disease. Rodents make up the bulk of the coyote diet in both urban and rural settings. Many areas, such as cemeteries and golf courses, have reported declines in damage associated with gophers once coyotes appeared. Coyotes also help to control geese in urban areas and on agricultural lands where flocks can forage and destroy young crops. Coyotes sometimes kill domestic and free-roaming cats for food or to remove competition. This can be controversial with some members of the public; however, a positive consequence of coyotes preying on feral cats can be an increase in nesting success for neo-tropical songbirds.

Mortality and Longevity

Coyote numbers are controlled by social stress, diseases, parasites, competition for food and predators. Historically, coyote populations were kept in check by gray wolves. Predators include humans, cougars, bears, and other coyotes. Eagles, dogs and adult coyotes kill some coyote pups. Coyotes have lived in captivity for up to 18 years. However, in the wild, few coyotes live more than four years. The majority of coyote pups die during their first year.

Viewing Coyotes

Coyotes have an enormous geographical distribution. They can be seen roaming range and prairie lands in eastern Oregon, the high deserts of central and southeast Oregon, open farmland in the Willamette Valley and the dense forest lands of Cascade Mountains and Oregon coast. Many coyote territories are associated with large parks or forest preserves, which provide an abundance of cover and food. Quite often they can be found making their homes in suburbs, towns, and cities, particularly near golf courses and parks. Their preferred habitats include patchworks of agricultural, brush and forest lands, although coyote dens also are found in steep banks, rock crevices, culverts, hollow logs and underbrush. Coyotes are considered "edge" users because this is where their primary prey is most abundant.



Open fields next to tree lines and brush is one good place to see coyotes.

Coyotes are generally wary of humans and usually won't stick around long once they've been spotted. For the best chance of seeing these beautiful animals, look for them in open pastures and around the edges of timbered areas. Once seen by humans, coyotes will usually bolt. So be still to improve the odds of getting a look at a coyote or, better yet, a chance to photograph one.

If you're lucky, you might even get to hear the call of the coyote.

Conflicts with humans

Coyote conflicts can range from relatively benign sightings to pet killings to an exceptionally rare attack on a human being. Coyotes differ from most other wildlife species in cities in that they can be considered a nuisance without any evidence of damage, but simply by being seen. Every year, ODFW receives many calls from people just because they have seen a coyote. Many people are not familiar with normal coyote behavior so often misconceptions and fear results.

Some of the most extreme examples of conflict between humans and coyotes are those cases where a coyote has attacked a pet or domestic livestock. Some counties have placed bounties on coyotes to help control predation on livestock.

While urbanization has encroached on habitat and displaced many wildlife species in the Pacific Northwest, coyotes have demonstrated amazing resiliency and adaptability in the presence of humans. Intelligent and adaptable, coyotes have benefited from people in some ways. Human development of buildings, canals, garbage dumps, domestic livestock and pets has provided coyotes with an abundance of food and shelter. Coyotes have made good use of these resources and are now common even in metropolitan areas.

As the populations of both people and coyotes increase, more frequent encounters between the two are inevitable. Therefore education is an important factor in dispelling misinformation about coyotes and coexisting with these remarkable animals.

Public safety

While coyote attacks are extremely rare, they are possible. Like any wild animal coyotes can behave unpredictably when cornered, sick or hurt.

If you have reason to believe that a wild animal constitutes a serious and imminent threat, defend yourself by whatever means is available and, if possible, activate your local emergency services by calling 9-1-1. Police have

specialized training, equipment and the authority to deal with any threat to public safety, including coyotes. Police will be able to assess whether the situation constitutes a public safety issue or simply a nuisance and act accordingly.

People who do not feel there is an imminent threat to their personal safety but see a coyote acting aggressively toward them or someone else should keep their distance, make a note of the animal's behavior, note when and where the behavior occurred, and contact their nearest [ODFW Field Office](#) or a licensed [Wildlife Control Operator](#).

Examples of behavior that should be reported to ODFW includes coyotes that have killed a pet in broad daylight, approached people without fear and acted aggressively by growling or barking when subjected to negative stimuli, and following children.

The key to responding appropriately to a threatening encounter with a coyote is to scare it away. Keeping coyotes wary of humans is essential to preventing conflicts with these animals. Responses to threatening encounters with coyotes can include shouting or scaring the animal with air horns and homemade clappers, banging pots and pans, stomping feet, waving arms, chasing from a safe distance, and throwing rocks or other objects toward the animal. However, these actions should be done cautiously and within reason to avoid conflicts that might not otherwise take place by injuring or cornering a coyote that simply wants to escape. Dog-walkers need to be cautious of coyote dens in the spring because coyote mothers may have pups in brushy areas or dens near buildings and roads. Coyote mothers can become very territorial and protective under these circumstances.

Public health concerns

Coyote diseases and parasites are rarely a risk to humans but can pose a risk to domestic dogs. Diseases related to coyotes include rabies, canine distemper, parvo and mange.

Dogs can be protected by vaccinations for rabies, distemper and parvo.

Anyone handling a coyote or a coyote carcass should wear rubber gloves and wash their hands well when finished. If a person is bitten or scratched by a coyote, immediately scrub the wound with soap and water and flush with clean water for several minutes. Contact your physician and the local health department immediately. If your pet is bitten, follow the same cleansing procedure and contact a veterinarian.

Living with coyotes

Most of the time, coyotes are considered by some to be more of a nuisance than actually a threat. Prevention is always the best medicine when it comes to avoiding, minimizing or correcting problems with coyotes. By far the greatest number of conflicts between humans and coyotes are those in which the animal has become habituated to a residential area by the behavior of human beings. Nine times out of ten, these problems arise because people have attracted the coyote by giving it access to food or shelter. Giving a wild animal food is never a good idea.

Fortunately, most of these situations are easily prevented or corrected by removing food sources and access to shelter.

Here are a few suggestions for minimizing the potential for conflicts with coyotes:

- **Do not leave small children unattended outdoors if coyotes have been frequenting the area**
- **Feed pets indoors and do not leave pet food or water bowls outside**
- **Supervise pets when they are outside; if possible, keep them leashed**
- **Do not leave cats or small dogs out after dark**
- **Secure garbage and garbage cans in an area inaccessible to wild animals (use bleach as necessary to remove odors that could attract coyotes)**
- **Harvest fruits and vegetables as they become ripe and do not allow them to accumulate and create an attraction for coyotes**
- **Never leave food or water out for feral animals or wildlife**
- **Bring livestock and fowl into barns, sheds or coyote-proof enclosures at night**
- **Trim and clear vegetation that provides cover for coyotes or their prey**
- **Remove birdfeeders. Coyotes are attracted to them and the birds and rodents that use the feeder**
- **Secure compost piles**
- **Clean barbecues regularly**
- **Build a coyote-proof perimeter fence**

Hunting and trapping

Oregon law assigns primary authority for control and management of coyotes to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which classifies coyotes as unregulated predators which may be destructive to agricultural crops.

Coyotes can be hunted or trapped at any time with approved methods. People need a hunting license to pursue coyotes on public lands and possibly on private lands under some circumstances.

See the [Hunting Furbearers](#) section of the ODFW Web site.

ODFW plays an advisory role in the management of these animals.

Lethal control

There are instances where coyote habituation is so severe that the coyotes must be removed. Coyotes are difficult to trap or shoot, and these actions should be undertaken by professionals, especially in urban areas. ODFW licenses individuals to perform these tasks. These individuals are called Wildlife Control Operators, and they generally offer their assistance for a fee. ODFW maintains a database of licensed [Wildlife Control Operators](#) on its Web site.

The United States Department of Agriculture's [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#) (APHIS) can also provide assistance with coyote control issues.

Relocation and Possession

It is illegal to capture coyotes from the wild and hold or process them in captivity.

It is unlawful to relocate a live coyote or any other wildlife species. Relocation is rarely effective for any wild animal because in most instances the animal has been habituated to human food sources and shelter, and it will simply resort to the same troublesome behavior in a new location. There also are concerns about disease transmission.