



## Coexisting with Coyotes:

Some Tips on living near coyotes:

1. Don't feed any wild animals such as raccoons or deer, which encourages coyotes as well. Garbage should be stored in secure containers. Do not put meat scraps in compost piles
2. Remove bird feeders and outside pet food containers. Coyotes will prey upon small mammals that are attracted to birdseed and pet food.
3. Do not allow pets to run free and keep a watchful eye on them. Walk dogs on a leash, especially at night. Keep cats indoors at all times. Do not let pets out at night unless accompanied by a person. Don't leave cat or dog food outside.
4. Provide secure shelters for poultry, rabbits, or other outside pets.
5. Clear wood piles, brush piles and other potential cover for coyotes. Secure garbage in areas where coyotes can not access it; keep yards clean of refuse and brush.
6. Do not leave small children outside unattended.
7. Reinforce the coyotes' natural fear of humans by turning on outside lights, making loud noises, throwing rocks and so forth. Be aggressive in your actions. Although the response may not be immediate, eventually the coyotes will flee.
8. Consider fencing your yard. Use a minimum height of 6 feet and bury the bottom at least six inches below ground level. Slant the top of the fence away from the enclosed area to prevent them from getting over the top
9. Encourage your neighbors to follow the same advice.

## **Coexisting with Coyotes Continued**

Coyotes are a permanent fixture in DuPage County's rural, suburban and urban areas. Seeing a coyote cross a field, backyard, road or golf course does not necessarily constitute a problem or dangerous situation, either for humans or domestic animals. Coyotes will be more active and more visible in late-winter/early spring during their breeding seasons. Most coyotes are harmless; their goal is to eat more natural foods such as mice and rabbits. However, coyotes are opportunistic. If coyotes see easy food – such as open garbage- and aren't afraid, they may take advantage. That puts them in direct line for a confrontation with pets. Coyotes are not interested in eating pets, these are territorial disputes. Studies have shown that attempts at eliminating all coyotes are not practical, economical or workable. When coyotes are removed others quickly move in.

Overpopulations of Canadian geese and deer in urban and suburban areas have provided coyotes with plenty of food sources. In some cases, coyote's predations on Canadian geese eggs and goslings have slowed their reproduction to 1 percent to 2 percent, down from 10 percent and 20 percent. Coyotes also have been known to take fawns or diseased adult deer.

Hunting and trapping coyotes has mixed results. Hunting and trapping can help control populations in rural areas, and instills and maintains the natural fear coyotes have for humans. However, removing all coyotes from an area is unrealistic and always temporary.



## Coyote Facts

### **APPEARANCE**

The coyote resembles a small German shepherd dog, but carries its tail below the level of the back rather than curved upward. Its upper body is typically light gray to dull yellow, but can vary from mostly black to nearly all gray or white. Course outer hairs are usually tipped with black. The under-parts are whitish, cream colored or pinkish yellow. A coyote's muzzle is long and narrow; its ears are erect and pointed. The average length of an adult is 44 to 54 inches, including a 15 to 17 inch tail. Weights measured during fall and winter varies from 22 to 42 pounds.

### **DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE**

Coyotes are common throughout Illinois. They're most abundant in the southern, southeastern and west-central parts of the state. They're least abundant in the northern two to three tiers of counties. Coyotes were rare in Illinois for a long time after settlement of the state, but their numbers increased dramatically during the 1970's and early 1980's

### **HABITAT**

Coyotes occur in nearly all types of habitat, including urban and suburban areas. They are most abundant in areas with a mixture of farmland, woodland and grassland.

### **HABITS**

A coyote lives in a large area, often 20 to 30 miles in diameter. Several coyotes may share this area. A pack of coyotes consists of an extended family that maintains a strict territory. Members of one pack rarely venture into the territory of another.

Some coyotes do not belong to packs. These solitary coyotes tend to have larger home ranges than pack coyotes and are less respectful of pack boundaries. They sometimes join a pack when one of the members leaves or dies.

Coyotes communicate with a variety of barks, yips and howls. They also mark areas with urine, feces or gland secretions, much like domestic dogs. Body language plays an important role in the family social structure and in meetings between strangers. Facial expressions and body gestures can signal a coyote's aggressive, submissive or neutral intentions.

Coyotes prefer semi-open country and like to travel on ridges or old trails. They are most active from dusk until the early morning hours, but are sometimes seen at other times of the day. They can run up to 43 miles per hour for short distances. Water is rarely a barrier because coyotes swim well.

Few coyotes live past 3 to 4 years of age. The oldest coyote found in a study conducted in Illinois during 1996 to 1997 was 13 years old.

## **FOOD**

Coyotes are Illinois' largest wild predator. Most of their diet consists of animal matter, but they often eat insects, fruits or berries. Rabbits and mice are important food items in Illinois and other Midwestern states.

A study conducted in Missouri showed the following food groups and their percentages by volume: rabbits 53.7; mice and rats 8.7; other wild mammals 7.5; livestock 8.9; poultry 11.3; wild birds 0.5; known carrion 5.8; insects 0.8; plants 2.0; and miscellaneous 0.8.

In Iowa, winter foods of coyotes were composed by volume of: 51 percent rabbits, 25.5 percent mice, 8.0 percent other mammals, 2.7 percent birds, 0.5 percent plants and

miscellaneous. Coyotes sometimes eat carrion, so it's difficult to determine whether livestock and poultry in their diet represent actual kills.

## **REPRODUCTION**

A few females breed at one year of age, but most mature in their second year. Breeding peaks in late February or early March. A female typically mates for two to five days during this period. The gestations (pregnancy) period is 58 to 63 days. Pups are born during late April or May in a den under a hollow tree, log, brush pile, or even an abandoned building. More often, coyotes raise their young in a remodeled burrow dug originally by a fox, badger, or woodchuck. Litters of 2 to 19 pups have been documented, but 4 to 9 is the norm. The pups are blind and helpless at birth and are covered with brownish-gray woolly fur. Their eyes open between 8 and 14 days of age. The young first come out of the dens when they're about 21 days old but don't remain outside for long periods until they are 5 to 6 weeks of age.

Both parents care for the young, especially after they're weaned. Hunting short distances from the den (usually 3 to 5 miles), the parents kill and eat what they catch, then regurgitate it for the pups when they return. The pups begin to learn to hunt for themselves when they are 8 to 12 weeks old. The families usually move away from the den about this time, and often break up in late summer or early fall. After they leave their parents, some young may move up to 120 miles away in search of their own living space.

## **CONSERVATION**

Coyotes are valuable members of the wildlife community and do more good than harm where humans are concerned. However, they occasionally kill livestock, poultry, domestic cats and small dogs, especially where coyotes live in large numbers or in close association with people. Most problems caused by coyotes can be solved by targeting and removing specific coyotes responsible.

Coyotes are harvested during regulated hunting and trapping seasons. Averages of 7,000 coyotes are harvested each year in Illinois. About 75 percent of these are taken by

hunters; 25 percent by trappers. The trapping season is restricted to the fall and winter months, while the hunting season is open year-round. A liberal hunting season allows landowners to remove problems animals without having to obtain a special permit. Biologists monitor the population to ensure that hunting and trapping does not negatively impact the population.