

Coyotes

Coyotes are a natural predator in Colorado, and fill a need in keeping smaller animal populations in check. The best solution for coyotes is to learn to coexist with them.

Description and habitat

Coyotes vary in size from 4-5 feet in length, 18-15 inches tall at the shoulders, and weigh 20-50 pounds with the males typically being larger than the females. They can vary in color from gray, brown, tan or reddish brown on the tops of their bodies, with a white underbelly. Coyotes live just about anywhere in Colorado. They are very adaptable and opportunistic animals. Their territories range from 300 acres to 100 square miles with the average size for a territory being 25-30 miles in diameter.

Behavior

Coyotes are very curious and opportunistic animals. They will attempt to investigate anything they can, but can be easily frightened. Coyotes living in an urban area may be less skittish than coyotes living in a more rural area because they

have become habituated to being around people. Their diet primarily consists of meat such as rodents (squirrels, mice, rats, etc.), rabbits, birds, and deer, but they also eat garbage, insects, fruits, berries and eggs. They are mostly solitary animals, but will occasionally hunt in pairs or a pack to take down a larger animal such as a deer.

They can be active at any time during the day and night, but are usually more active between dusk and dawn. They mate between February and April, have a gestation period of eight weeks, and give birth to an average of six pups. The size of the litter can vary greatly depending on the food source available. Both parents will raise the pups until they are young adults, at which point they will leave to find their own territory. Probably everyone has heard a coyote howl at some point in their lives, as they are very vocal and have a very distinctive "language" of their own.

Benefits

Since coyotes are opportunistic animals, they will eat other dead animals that they come across. They control the rodent population, as rodents consist of 80 percent of their diet.

Common Problems and Solutions

Coyotes in a neighborhood

In an urban area, coyotes may be less afraid of humans as they see them as an easy and dependable food source. Do not feed coyotes or any other wild animal. Secure trash cans with tight fitting lids, and if possible store trash cans in a garage or shed. Never leave pet food outside. This is a very easy and dependable food source for coyotes, as the food bowl will be filled daily. If you have a compost pile, have it in an enclosed bin. Make sure any spilled bird seed from bird feeders is cleaned up on a regular basis. Pick up any fallen fruit from fruit trees in your yard, and if fruit falls to the ground, clean it up as soon as possible and dispose of it either in a secured compost pile or the trash. Eliminate any standing water in your yard. If you have a pond, consider covering the pond with heavy wire to prevent the coyote from accessing the water source. Trim any shrubs that may be around your house so the coyote doesn't have a place to hide, and install motion detector lights. There are also commercial products found at garden centers that you can put around the border of your yard that will repel wildlife. These products would need to be reapplied every few days. Hazing coyotes by making loud noises such as clapping, yelling, or whistling is recommended. Air horns can also be used (but not recommended late at night – your neighbors probably won't appreciate it).

Concern for pet cats and dogs

Never leave pet food outside for any length of time. Do not allow your cat(s) or dog(s) to roam freely through the neighborhood. Spay and neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to female dogs in heat (per city ordinance your female dog that is in heat is required to be in an enclosed and secured area such as a dog run with a top or inside your home for the duration of the heat cycle), and pet male dogs can be attracted to female coyotes in heat. Tall fencing may deter coyotes from going into your yard. The fence should be at least 6 feet tall and go into the ground approximately 6 inches. When walking your dog, make sure to keep it on a leash at all times, and use extra caution dusk through dawn when coyotes are more active. Stay away from any known den sites, and avoid thick vegetation. DO NOT allow your dog to interact with any coyotes you might encounter.



Trapping and relocating:

Relocating a coyote from their territory is a short term solution that will create a bigger long term problem. By relocating a single coyote, that territory has now opened up for other wildlife to move in. This will also cause an increase in the rodent population which will increase the coyote population due to higher food sources. This will increase a litter size creating more coyotes in the future to deal with. Coyotes are considered furbearing animals by Colorado Division of Wildlife. Any trapping must be done either by obtaining a trapping license through Colorado Division of Wildlife or by hiring a private trapping company.

What to do if you encounter a coyote

If you see a coyote while out on a walk or run, do not run away or turn your back. Be as big and loud as possible, and wave your arms. Face the coyote and back away slowly. If the coyote does approach you, throw whatever object is handy, and if attacked fight back.