



THE URBAN/SUBURBAN COYOTE

Historically, coyotes were most commonly found on the Great Plains of North America. Their range now extends from Central America to the Arctic. Except for Hawaii, coyotes live in all of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In spite of being hunted and trapped for more than 200 years, more coyotes exist today than when the U.S. Constitution was signed.

Hardly any animal in America is more adaptable to changing conditions than the coyote. Coyotes can live just about anywhere. They are found in deserts, swamps, tundra, grasslands, brush, and dense forests, from below sea level to high mountains. They have also learned to live in suburbs and cities like Los Angeles (including the City of Long Beach area), New York, Phoenix, and Denver.

One of the keys to the coyote's success is its diet. A true scavenger, the coyote will eat just about anything. Identified as a killer of sheep, poultry and deer, the coyote will also eat snakes and foxes, doughnuts and sandwiches, rodents and rabbits, fruits and vegetables, birds, frogs, grass and grasshoppers, pet cats and cat food, pet dogs and dog food, carrion, and just plain garbage.

Coyotes are active mainly during the nighttime, but they can be moving at any time during the day. Most sightings of coyotes occur during the hours close to sunrise and sunset.

Adult coyotes weigh between 20 and 45 pounds. Females are generally smaller than males and western coyotes are generally smaller than eastern coyotes.

Coyotes look like small collie dogs. They have erect pointed ears, slender muzzle, and a bushy tail. Most coyotes are brownish gray in color with a light gray to cream-colored belly. However, a coyote's color varies and may be somewhat darker or lighter depending upon the geographic region and the time of year. Most coyotes have dark or black hairs over their back and tail.

In California, coyotes breed mainly during January, February and March. The gestation period is about 60-63 days. Young are born March through May, with litter sizes averaging 5-6 pups.

Coyotes produce one litter per year. The young are weaned at 5-6 weeks and leave the parents at 6-9 months. Most adults breed first in their second year. Non-breeding, yearling coyotes often stay with the adult parents and help care for the pups. Coyote dens are found in steep banks, rock crevices, sinkholes and underbrush. Coyote dens are often holes that have been used by badgers, skunks, foxes or other animals with entrances enlarged to about one foot in diameter. Dens vary from 4-5 feet deep to 50 feet deep. The diet of the coyote consists mainly of mice, rats, ground squirrels, gophers, rabbits and carrion. They also eat insects, reptiles, amphibians, fruits, birds and their eggs, and deer fawns. In some rural areas of California, they prey heavily on sheep, cattle and poultry. In urban and suburban areas, garbage, domestic cats and dogs, other pets, hobby animals and pet food can be important food items. Coyotes are most active at night and during the early morning and late evening hours. In areas where they are not disturbed by human activities, and during the cooler times of the year, they may be active throughout the day. Urban coyotes are becoming very tolerant of human activities. Young coyotes tend to be more active during daylight hours than adults.



Coyotes can cause substantial damage. In rural areas they oftentimes kill sheep, calves and poultry. In some parts of the state they cause damage to drip irrigation systems by biting holes in the pipe. In other areas they cause considerable damage to watermelons, citrus fruits and avocados. Aircraft safety is often jeopardized when coyotes take up residence on or near runways. Coyotes have also been known to prey on various endangered/threatened species including the San Joaquin kit fox and the California least tern. In urban and suburban areas, coyotes commonly take domestic house cats, small dogs, poultry and other domestic animals. Coyotes have been known to attack humans

Distemper and canine hepatitis are among the most common diseases of coyotes. Rabies and tularemia also occur and may be transmitted to humans and other animals. Coyotes often carry parasites, including mites, ticks, fleas, worms and flukes. Mites, which cause sarcoptic mange,

are an important ectoparasite of coyotes. Heartworm is one of the most important endoparasites in California's coyote population. This parasite can be transmitted to domestic dogs by mosquitoes.

PROBLEM PREVENTION

Coyotes are attracted to urban/suburban areas by the easy accessibility of food, water and shelter. Reducing or eliminating the availability of these elements will often encourage coyotes to leave. Garbage can lids should be secured at all times or garbage stored indoors. Pets should be fed during daylight hours and all pet food removed before darkness. Water bowls should be emptied and not left out after dark. Ripe fruits and vegetables should be covered at night or the garden/fruit trees enclosed by a coyote-proof fence to prevent access by hungry coyotes. All windfall fruit/vegetables should be picked up daily. In areas where predation on pets has been documented, cats and small dogs should not be left out after dark unless enclosed in a coyote-proof enclosure. Food should never intentionally be left out for wild mammals. In suburban areas where livestock such as lambs, piglets, calves or poultry are raised and coyote predation has been documented, precautions should be taken to prevent further losses.

To exclude coyotes, fences should be constructed which are at least 5 ½ feet tall. These can be made of solid wood, cement blocks, brick or wire. If net wire fencing is used, the bottom portion should be at least 3 ½ feet tall with squares smaller than 6 inches. If high tensile fence is used, it should be electrified with a fence charger to prevent coyotes from going through. All fences should have some sort of galvanized wire apron buried at least 4 to 6 inches in the ground, which extends out from the fence at least 15 to 20 inches. The apron should be securely attached to the bottom of the fence. Coyotes are very adept diggers and prefer to dig under fences rather than jump them.

Brush and vegetation should be cleared from backyards and adjacent areas to eliminate habitat for prey, which could attract coyotes. Landscaping should be pruned on a regular basis. These actions also remove hiding cover used by coyotes to stalk domestic pets. If cats cannot be contained indoors, and predation is viewed as a problem, posts can be installed in open space areas, which provide an escape for the cats. These posts should be at least 7 feet tall, made of material that the cat can climb, and have enough space on top for the cat to sit.

During the time of the year when adult coyotes are caring for young (May-September), they can be very aggressive when their young are threatened. Domestic dogs are especially vulnerable to attack during this time. Even dogs on leashes have been attacked when they got too close to a family of coyotes. In urban settings where a den site has been identified, caution should be taken to keep dogs out of the area. These areas should be posted with signs, and people concerned about attacks on their dogs should avoid the area. Increased predation on domestic pets can be expected around den sites, and extra precautions should be taken by residents to protect valued domestic cats or small dogs

Animal Care Services will respond to and impound any coyote that is:

- **Injured/Sick/Dead**
- **Has been involved in a bite with a human**

If any of these conditions exist, please call City of Long Beach Animal Care Services at:

(562) 570-7387