

# Coexisting in Coyote Country



## City of Aurora Parks and Open Space Department

*Our Mission: To be a steward of outdoor spaces  
essential for people and nature to thrive in our  
community.*

# Ripped from the headlines...

February 08: A young coyote that was nipping at the ski boots and parkas of skiers grew increasingly aggressive and was killed by a Colorado Division of Wildlife officer at Copper Mountain Resort.

# Ripped from the headlines...

Too bad they won't shoot the [darn] things in Bible Park. People ought to be able to walk their pets without worrying about the coyotes.

There are places [coyotes] just don't belong.

2/12 Denver Post website

# Ripped from the headlines...

Here we have the spoiled rich air headed concrete dwellers wetting themselves over one coyote and the Division of Wildlife responds as if a ravaging pack of wild dingoes were on the loose.

These limp-wristed girly men skiers should [do something creative with their ski poles].

If you cannot live with wildlife get your tired [self] out. Wildlife is wonderful, the problem is there are too many people.

2/12 Denver Post Website

# Coexisting in Coyote Country

Who is correct?



# Coexisting in Coyote Country

**Successful coexistence with coyotes requires an understanding of how coyotes survive, as well as an understanding of how humans can shape coyote behavior.**



# Discussion Goals

- Gain a basic understanding of coyote natural history and behavior
- Learn essential predator and coexistence vocabulary
- Assess a variety of coyote sightings, encounters, incidents, and attacks for normal, abnormal, and unacceptable coyote behavior
- Understand the human role in shaping urban coyote behavior
- Provide access to additional information and resources

# Section 1: coyote biology and behavior primer

## Coyote Myth vs. Fact



# Humans have impacted the coyote's natural range.

Fact. Removal of wolves, deforestation, and the suburban landscape have all contributed to a range expansion which extends across the entire United States, up into Canada and Alaska; and down into the Yucatan, Belize, and Panama.

# Coyotes are carnivores.



Myth. Dentition classifies them as carnivore, but scat and behavior indicate scavenger, omnivore, or opportunistic feeder; the ultimate flexitarian.

# Coyote Diets Vary Greatly



*“Although coyotes are predators, they are also opportunistic and shift their diets to take advantage of the most available prey.” (Gehrt 2006)*

- 70.3% of diet beneficial to humans (Murie, 1940)
- Human food sources present 1.9% to 25% of the time
- Domestic cat may be present in up to 13.6% (Wirtz *et al* 1982)



**(2006 urban Chicago)**

Small rodents 42%

White-tailed deer 22%

Fruit 23%

Cottontail 18%

Birds 13%

Raccoon 8%

Grass 6%

Invertebrates 4%

Human-associated 2%

Domestic cat 1%

Muskrat 1%

Unk 1%

~1400 scats from urban Chicago coyotes.

# Coyotes live and hunt in packs.

Myth. Hunting style depends on prey, habitat, and time of year. Coyotes are primarily solitary hunters, but may hunt cooperatively with family members, particularly in winter.



# Coyotes never attack humans.



Myth. It is rare, but under certain circumstances coyotes do attack humans. Only one known fatality attributed to coyotes.

# I should be nice to the coyote when it is in my neighborhood.

**Myth.** You should haze a coyote that is in your yard or roaming the streets of your neighborhood. Hazing techniques include: bright lights, banging on pots and pans, speaking forcefully, tossing rocks, etc. A coyote should not feel welcome in your neighborhood.



# Coyotes are smarter than my pet dog or cat.



Fact. Coyote has an ancient reputation as a trickster for a reason. They are cunning, intelligent, and know how to work the system.

# Coyotes are naturally afraid of humans.



**Fact.** A wild coyote possesses a natural fear of humans. A coyote that has been fed or welcomed into a neighborhood or yard will lose its fear of humans. A coyote that is not afraid of humans is *habituated*.

# Humans create great habitat for coyotes.

Fact. “Human sources of food and water including unsecured garbage, pet food, free-roaming cats and small dogs; rodents, fruit trees, fruits, ponds, and irrigation systems can attract coyotes.”

(Fredriani *et al* 2001)



# Coyotes are nocturnal.



Myth. Coyotes are crepuscular and diurnal in the absence of humans. In areas where there are humans and coyotes are harassed, activity changes to nocturnal. (Kitchen et al, 2000)

# Removing problem coyotes is an effective way to solve conflicts.

**Myth.**

**There will always be a replacement coyote.**

“Following removals, populations return to pre-control levels, which are largely controlled by food resources.”(Knowlton *et al.* 1999)

“While trapping programs allow public officials to tell the public that they are doing something about the situation, their effectiveness is questionable because of the coyote’s ability to rebound and recolonize vacant territories.” (Knowlton *et al.* 1999; Sacks *et al.* 1999; Gompper 2002)

“To suppress a coyote population over the long-term, more than 70% of the coyotes would need to be removed annually.” (Connolly and Longhurst 1975)

“Lethal removal may stimulate improved reproductive success and pup survival in the remaining coyote population.” (Connolly and Longhurst 1975, Davison 1980, Sterling *et al.* 1983, Crabtree and Sheldon 1999)

# It is easy to remove problem coyotes from a neighborhood.

Myth.

- Relocation: By permit only. CDOW does not authorize relocations of predators in the metro area because it is simply moving a problem.
- Trapping: A 30-day permit for trapping can be obtained from county health officials in cases where there is a documented threat to HUMAN health and safety.
- Shooting: Most municipalities do not allow the discharge of firearms in neighborhoods. USDA Wildlife Services can be hired to remove coyotes using firearms. Current price tag is \$96,000/year.

**The coyote I see looking in my backyard from the bike path lives in the den nearby.**

Myth.

Coyote home ranges vary from .25 miles to 40 square miles, depending on habitat, social status, and food resources.

# Coyotes are passive creatures.



Myth. Coyotes defend territories and food resources from each other and from other species. They do not tolerate competition from mesocarnivores such as foxes, raccoons, skunks, feral cats, and domestic pets.

**In general, people love coyotes.**



**Myth.**

# How did you do?



Time to check your vocabulary...

# Essential Coexistence Vocabulary



Inconsistent and exaggerated reports of coyote attacks can lead to heightened public fears. (Fox 2006)

# Important Vocabulary

- **Hazing:** Using unpleasant sounds, objects, etc. to discourage a behavior.
- **Encroachment:** Trespass or entry into another's property without permission.
- **Depredation:** Predation on domestic animals that a predator would not normally encounter in the wild.
- **Habituation:** A learned behavior in which an animal exhibits a lessened response with repetition of stimulus. The process of getting an animal used to a situation that it normally avoids.

## Exactly what kind of interaction did you have with the coyote?

- **Observation:** The act of noticing or taking note. Residents may make an *observation* of tracks, scat, vocalizations.
- **Sighting:** Visual observation of an animal. Vast majority of human-coyote interactions are *sightings*.
- **Encounter:** An unexpected direct meeting that is without incident .
- **Incident:** A conflict with an unsafe situation, animal displayed unacceptable or abnormal behavior. Most attacks on pets fall into this category. (Palo Alto, CA, Open Space Nature Preserves Policies and Procedures Manual, 2007)
- **Attack:** An aggressive action initiated by the animal that involves physical contact with a human. Human is injured or killed by a wild animal. (Fox 2006)
- **Unprovoked:** Person did not enter an animal's personal space, try to touch, injure, or use an attractant.
- **Provoked:** When a person enters an animal's personal space or purposefully tries to touch or injure, or lures (intentionally or not) with food or other attractant.

**Learning to tell the difference between normal coyote behavior and nuisance coyote behavior is essential. Using proper vocabulary to describe interactions is essential.**



Are you ready for a quiz?

# Scenarios

“There were packs [of coyotes] running through the neighborhood at night howling up a storm.”

“I was sitting at the kitchen table one morning drinking coffee and two coyotes looked into my yard, in broad daylight.”

“A coyote ran through the parking area in broad daylight with a cat in its mouth.”

“I was walking my small dog on a flexi-leash when a coyote popped out of the cattails about just ahead of us. It stared for a moment with its tail down, then ran away.”

“A coyote followed me and my dog along the High Line Canal.”

# Scenarios

“I let my 21-pound dog out in the backyard—which backs up to a golf course—at about 11 p.m. A coyote climbed through the fence, attacked and killed my dog.”

“I was with my toddler at Jewell Wetland when I noticed a coyote was watching me and my children.”

“I was walking along the practice fields when I noticed a coyote watching me from the other side of the drainage. As I got closer, it ran away.”

“A coyote tugged at a child’s jacket when he approached the coyote with his hand outstretched.”

“I can hear the coyotes killing bunnies at night.”

“The coyote was following the child to the school bus.”

# Take home message:



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Negative coyote/human interactions in suburban areas are preventable, but the long-term solution of this conflict requires public education and changes in resident's behavior.

(Hopland Research and Extension Center, 2004)

# Education is the key...

Let's hope this discourages folks  
from feeding wildlife!

2/12 Denver Post Website

Keep your  
coyotes wild!

