



Coyote Information: Deterring Coyotes and Protecting Pets from Coyote Attacks

Questions answered by:

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1. Why are coyotes moving into urban and suburban communities? Downtown Chicago has even reported having a problem and a few years ago, one went into a Quizno's sandwich shop and jumped behind the counter!

Yes, coyotes are found pretty much everywhere now, including urban centers. There is an incredible photo of a coyote that got onto a subway car in Portland, curled up and went to sleep on a seat. They are a western species that naturally expanded its range east and were also intentionally introduced to the east between the 40's and 80's.

There are a couple of reasons why they are found everywhere now. First, coyotes are generalists, which means they can make a living on just about anything. They don't have narrow requirements for habitat, food, and such, like specialist species do – this means they can live off their natural prey (smaller mammals like rabbits, squirrels, and even deer fawn, as well as insects, fruits, birds, and herpetofauna [amphibians and reptiles]), but they also do fine preying on domestic pets and small livestock, human refuse, and agricultural crops. Second, our urban and suburban areas are spreading nationwide, so in a way, the coyotes are not moving into our areas...we have moved into theirs. They are master adapters, so they do fine with or without human presence.

2. Are they more prevalent in certain parts of the country or are they everywhere?

They are found everywhere – their range extends from central America to the Arctic.

3. How common are pet attacks/deaths by coyotes?

It does happen from time to time, but it is not all that common. When it does happen, it is typically because humans are engaging in “risky” behavior – (e.g., leaving/letting their pets outside alone, walking pets at night in urban centers). I like to think of it this way...a coyote is just being a coyote, so it going to do whatever it can to make a living at the lowest possible energetic cost to them – pets are much easier to take than wild prey, so pets are advantageous in terms of energy expenditures. Coyotes are here to stay, even in the east where they are technically not native, so we have to adjust to their behavior and that means humans need to avoid those “risky” behaviors if we are to avoid interactions and conflict with coyotes.

4. How can people address coyote issues in their own backyard?

People can make their property less attractive to coyotes by keeping trees and shrubbery trimmed to reduce cover (hiding places for coyotes). They can install coyote-proof fences (these are typically quite high) or use motion-triggered deterrent lights or sprinkler systems. They can make sure to secure their garbage cans and refuse. Another thing is feeding animals outdoors, either domestic or wild. Food attracts prey species...prey attracts coyotes, so it is best to avoid feeding animals outdoors.

5. How can they deter coyotes and protect their pets (i.e., don't leave your pets outside at night, keep more lights on, don't leave food outside that will attract coyotes)

The biggest thing is to not let pets out on their own, especially at night in urban areas; urban coyotes tend to be more nocturnal than coyotes found in natural areas. Further, small pets are at most risk of attack, but coyotes are also known to cooperatively hunt larger dogs too, although this is far less common. Keeping cats indoor and walking your dog or keeping them in a fenced yard will reduce the risk significantly. Also pick up after your dog (or cat) – feces can attract coyotes too. Carry a headlamp or flashlight when walking your dog at night. If you see a coyote while walking your dog, do not turn your back on it. Aim your light at it (in the eyes when possible), maintain eye contact with it, and do not run – back up until you and your pet are safely away from it.

6. If you see a coyote in your yard with your pet, what should you do?

Stand up tall and make yourself appear large; face the coyote; haze it - yell and make a lot of noise, throw sticks and rocks at it (avoiding your pet, of course). This may scare it away or it may be enough of a distraction to give your pet the chance to get away or for you to get to your pet.

7. What should you do if your pet gets bitten by a coyote?

Get your pet to a veterinarian and report the attack to South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as soon as possible. Sometimes coyotes get habituated to humans and, thus, become more brazen; those habituated coyotes are animals DNR should be notified about at once.

8. Can coyotes carry rabies?

Yes, like all mammalian species, coyotes can be rabid and can spread the disease. If a human is attacked by a coyote (which has is extremely rare), they should head to the ER immediately. If a pet is attacked, the owner should seek medical attention for the pet as soon as possible. The pet may already have its rabies vaccination, but the vet may give them a booster and needs to treat any wounds.

9. Anything else we should know about coyotes and pet protection?

There are several items on the market for protecting pets, such anti-coyote collars and jackets – the vests are made of Kevlar and have spikes on the back of the jacket and on the collar – both should help to deter attacks and prevent some injury, although I have not seen any statistics on their effectiveness. They also make your pet look very cool 😊