

Living with Coyotes - Precautions

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, New York, Phoenix, Denver and Claremont.

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.

Pups are cared for by both parents and can eat meat and move about well by the time they are a month old. Because food requirements increase dramatically during pup rearing, this is a period when conflicts between humans and urban coyotes are common. By 6 months of age, pups have permanent teeth and are nearly fully grown. About this time, mother coyotes train their offspring to search for food so it is not unusual to observe a family group traveling through parks and golf courses. If food is deliberately or inadvertently provided by people, the youngsters quickly learn not to fear humans and will develop a dependency on easy food sources.

In areas where they are hunted or trapped, coyotes are extremely wary of human beings. However, in urban areas where they are less likely to be harmed and more likely to associate people with an easy and dependable source for food, they can become very bold. They will come up to the door of a house if food is regularly present. Coyotes have learned that small dogs and cats are easy prey.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce the chance of human-coyote conflicts:

- Do not feed coyotes!
- Eliminate sources of water, particularly in dry climates.
- Bird feeders should be positioned so that coyotes can't get the feed. Coyotes are attracted by bread, table scraps, and even seed. They may also be attracted by birds and rodents that come to the feeders.
- Do not discard edible garbage where coyotes can get to it.
- Secure garbage containers and eliminate garbage odors.
- Feed pets indoors whenever possible. Pick up any leftovers if feeding outdoors. Store pet and livestock feed where it is inaccessible to wildlife.
- Trim and clean, near ground level, any shrubbery that provides hiding cover for coyotes or prey.
- Fencing your yard could deter coyotes. The fence should be at least 6 feet high with the bottom extending at least 6 inches below ground level for best results.
- Don't leave small children unattended outside if coyotes have been frequenting the area.
- Don't allow pets to run free. Keep them safely confined and provide secure nighttime housing for them. Walk your dog on a leash and accompany your pet outside, especially at night. Provide secure shelters for poultry, rabbits, and other vulnerable animals.
- Install motion-sensitive lighting around your residence.
- Discourage coyotes from frequenting your area. If you observe coyotes around your home or property, chase them away by shouting making loud noises, or blowing a whistle. **You can obtain a free whistle at the Claremont Police Department (570 W. Bonita Ave., Claremont).**

These steps may decrease the frequency of coyote sightings in your area if practiced continuously. However, coyotes are adaptable to change and are quick to learn new ways of survival. Occasional sightings will most likely continue. By making life for coyotes in your neighborhood more difficult, you will increase the likelihood that they will go somewhere else.

If you encounter a coyote and it is acting in an aggressive manner toward a human and one's safety is in danger, dial 9-1-1 and the police department will respond.