



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE:

The Nature of Coyotes

Ontario is home to over 30,000 different species of animals and plants. This biodiversity provides us with many benefits, including healthier communities.

The Ministry of Natural Resources helps manage wildlife in Ontario and reduce conflict between people and species. We help people find ways to conserve nature and protect their family and property.

What is a Coyote?

The eastern coyote, found throughout much of southern Ontario and agricultural areas in the north, is a hybrid between the smaller western coyote and the eastern wolf.

Adult females weigh an average of 13 to 16 kilograms, while males' average weight varies between 16 and 18 kilograms.

Coyotes are territorial animals, with their territory ranging from a few square kilometres where food is abundant to more than 100 square kilometres where food is very scarce.

Diet

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and will consume a variety of foods, including meat, carrion (dead animals), fruit and vegetables.

In winter, their diet consists mainly of rabbits, hares and deer when the snow is so deep that the deer's mobility is restricted. In spring, summer and fall, coyotes prey mainly on small mammals (fox, rodents, rabbits, mice and voles) and eat wild berries, birds, amphibians, grasshoppers and deer fawns.

Life Cycle

Coyotes often mate for life. Mated pairs usually breed in February, with pups born in April or May. Litters average five or six pups, but can range from two to 10. Both parents share pup-rearing duties, and begin to teach the pups hunting skills when the pups are eight to 10 weeks old.

Juveniles usually leave their parents' territory during their first autumn or winter to establish their own territory. What are sometimes referred to as "packs" of coyotes are generally an adult breeding pair and their pups from the most recent litter.

In some areas, coyotes can live eight to 12 years. In areas where they are hunted, or in populated areas like southern Ontario where vehicle collisions are common, the average life expectancy is less than five years.

Habitat

Coyotes are most commonly associated with open, agricultural landscapes interspersed with woodlots and other brushy terrain. They are also found in green spaces and industrial areas within cities.



Behaviour

Since migrating to Ontario more than 100 years ago, coyotes have adapted well to both rural and urban environments. The eastern coyote is now an integral and permanent part of our diverse landscape.

Many people hear coyotes without ever seeing them because of their night time howls, barks and yips. Coyotes howl to broadcast occupancy of their territory and keep members of the family group aware of each other's locations while hunting or travelling alone. Howling may also help co-ordinate some feeding activities.

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. They have adapted well to living near humans and development. In urban areas, they tend to be nocturnal, typically roaming at night looking for food and spending the daylight hours bedded in bushy or wooded areas.

It is unusual for coyotes to show no fear of humans. Coyotes displaying no fear of humans or exhibiting aggressive behaviours have likely been habituated to people through direct or indirect feeding.

Size of Populations

Coyote populations normally fluctuate in response to the abundance or scarcity of food. When food supplies are limited, they experience a higher mortality rate and lower reproduction rates.

Humans account for the majority of coyote deaths through hunting, trapping and motor-vehicle accidents.

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Diseases

Coyote diseases or parasites are rarely a risk to humans.

Rabies is rare in coyotes in Ontario. Coyotes may actually help to reduce the incidence of rabies in Ontario since they often prey on foxes, a species more likely to carry the disease.

Mange is common in coyote populations in Ontario. Mange is caused by a parasitic mite that burrows into the outer layer of the skin, resulting in loss of fur, extreme irritation and can cause death.

Conflicts

In a small number of cases coyotes lose their fear of people and start preying on livestock. These problem coyotes require more serious measures. There are tools for farmers and rural landowners that will help them deal with coyote conflicts and predation.

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LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Protecting Dogs from Coyotes

While coyotes, by nature, are wary of humans, they are opportunistic feeders and have been known to kill small dogs that have been left unattended.

Small dogs may be seen as prey by coyotes, while larger dogs may be injured in a confrontation.

Protecting Your Dog on Your Property

- Coyotes are primarily nocturnal. Keep your dogs inside at night.
- Fence your property with a two-metre-high fence that extends at least 20 centimetres underground as coyotes may dig under a barrier. If you can't fence your yard, keep your dog on leash. If there are coyotes in your area, pet owners should keep a close eye on their pets at all times even if they are in a fenced in yard.
- Clean up after your dog.
Coyotes are attracted to dog feces.
- Keep pet food indoors.

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Protecting Your Dog off Your Property

- Keep your dog on leash.
- Carry a flashlight at night to scare off coyotes.
- Do not let your dog chase a coyote as it could result in injury to your dog.

Other tips

- Do not let your dogs roam from your property. Coyote diseases and parasites can be a risk to domestic dog.
- Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, domestic dogs that have not been spayed or neutered.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Coyote-proofing your Property



What You Can Do

People and wild animals live side by side in Ontario. Preventing a problem is a far better solution than dealing with wildlife after a conflict.

As a property owner, you have a role in making sure you are not attracting wildlife to your property that you don't want there.

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Preventing Encounters

Limit attractants:

- Keep pet food indoors
- Use secure garbage containers with locking lids and store in an enclosed structure.
- Put garbage out the morning of a scheduled pickup.
- Use enclosed composting bins rather than exposed piles.
- Pick ripe fruit and seed from trees and remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Protect vegetable gardens with heavy-duty garden fences or place vegetable plants in a greenhouse.

Discourage coyotes from entering your property:

- Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes may find cover and small animals.
- Use motion sensor lights.
- Close off spaces under porches, decks and sheds. Coyotes use these areas for denning and raising young.
- If you fence your property, install a two-metre-high fence that extends at least 20 centimetres underground as coyotes may dig under a barrier.
- Electric fencing can also help deter coyotes.

To prevent predation if you own livestock

- Where possible, bring your livestock into barns or sheds at night.
- Guard animals, such as donkeys, llamas and dogs can be cost-effective ways to protect livestock from coyotes. Guard animals develop bonds with livestock and will aggressively ward off predators.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE:

Encounters with Coyotes

People and wild animals live side by side in Ontario. We all share responsibility for preventing and handling human-wildlife conflicts.

Coyotes find their way to residential areas where they may tear open garbage, cause concern for residents and even come into conflict with pets.

Avoiding Coyote Conflicts

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. However, they are wild animals and should not be approached.

People should never feed coyotes. Feeding them makes the animals less fearful of humans and habituates them to foods provided by humans. Never attempt to "tame" a coyote.

Do not let pets chase coyotes as it could result in injuries to your pet.

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What to do if you Encounter a Coyote

Coyote sightings are commonplace. If you see a coyote, keep your distance and the animal will most likely avoid you.

If you encounter an aggressive coyote, there are several things you should know and do.

- Never approach or touch a coyote.
- Do not turn your back on, or run from, a coyote.
- Back away from the coyote while remaining calm.
- Stand tall, wave your hands and make lots of noise.
- Carry a flashlight at night to scare off coyotes.
- If a coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 911.