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Wild Evergreen – Coyotes are back in the ‘hood – Evergreen Audubon

11-13 minutes

I’ve seen several posts on social media recently, mostly Evergreen community Facebook sites and in emails, reporting that coyotes are once again roaming our neighborhoods. When I moved to Evergreen in 1989, it was fairly common to see coyotes and hear them gathering and yipping at night. Fox were also fairly common. During the last few years, however, I’ve seen fewer and fewer of both species.

Their populations have been reduced likely due to disease, like mange, predators, and well-intended residents ‘taking them out’. In Colorado, coyotes are classified as a game species and may be taken year-round with either a small game or a furbearer license. Landowners may kill coyotes, without a license, on their land if the coyotes threaten their property or livestock.

Note: Indiscriminate killing of coyotes to decrease their density doesn’t work as a management strategy. Coyotes repopulate an area quickly and easily when competition is eliminated, with the population rebounding or even expanding in a very short time. Perhaps a more effective, cost-cutting and non-lethal strategy for reducing the number of coyotes in an area would be playing

recorded group yip-howls to make resident coyotes think there is more competition for resources.

Regardless of the reason for their decline, the population of voles, rabbits, chipmunks, and ground squirrels has surged. Coyotes and fox did a good job of keeping them in check.



Photo by Marilyn Rhodes.

Perhaps no other wild animal has endured the wrath of humans while evoking such genuine heartfelt admiration quite like the coyote. Some people curse their existence; Native Americans consider them to be the smartest animal on earth, calling them “God’s dog,” and many urbanites revel in opportunities to see and hear these vocal predators.





Photo by Shirley Casey.

“Coyote” is derived from the Aztec word “coyotl.” Prior to 1900, coyotes were found only west of the Mississippi in the U.S. and west of Lake Nipigon in Ontario, Canada. Now, they are everywhere except Hawaii. The coyote has done so well because of the decline in wolf populations and their own ability to adapt.

Vocalizations

Often, our first encounter with coyotes is hearing a pack’s yip-howl. The scientific name for the coyote is *Canis latrans*, which translates to “barking dog,” a perfect name for this species which has been called the most vocal of North America’s mammals.

Less formally, the coyote is known as the song dog, and one listen to a group howl by a pack of coyotes makes it clear why. Rather than the simple but soul-haunting sound of a wolf’s howl, the coyote’s howl can be made up of high-pitched howls, barks, and yips that make it clear the coyote has a whole lot of lyrics in a single song. But what exactly do those lyrics say?

Group Yip-Howl – This is what coyotes are really known for. The group yip-howl is sent up when coyotes reunite, or just before they separate to go off hunting individually. As more coyotes join in, the more intense the vocalizations become, increasing in frequency and amplitude.

The group yip-howl probably strengthens social bonds, may help to synchronize mood, and may also reaffirm social status within

the pack. The group yip-howl “may be most important in announcing territorial occupancy and preventing visual contact between groups of coyotes.”

The chorus tells any nearby coyote packs about whose turf this is, and thus keeps other coyotes away. It also reveals (or hides) how many coyotes are in the area and may help regulate coyote density through reproductive rate. Research has shown that female coyotes will produce larger litters when there is little competition, and smaller litters when there is a high density of coyotes in the habitat. This is one of the secrets to the coyote’s success at spreading across the continent in the last century.



Photo by Shirley Casey.

Hunting and feeding

Coyotes are opportunistic hunters. They prey on small mammals, domestic pets, livestock, and domestic fowl but will also readily eat carrion and plants. A coyote will adjust its diet depending on the food that is available.

Social and reproductive behaviors





A pack of coyotes in Estes Park. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes.

- The basic social unit of a coyote pack is a family containing a reproductive female.
- Families are formed in midwinter, when females enter estrus.
- Unlike the wolf, which has been known to practice both monogamous and bigamous matings, the coyote is strictly monogamous, even in areas with high coyote densities and abundant food.
- Females that fail to mate sometimes assist their sisters or mothers in raising their pups, or join their siblings until the next time they can mate.
- The newly mated pair then establishes a territory and either constructs their own den or cleans out abandoned badger, marmot, or skunk earths.
- During the pregnancy, the male frequently hunts alone and brings back food for the female. The female may line the den with dried grass or with fur pulled from her belly.
- The gestation period is 63 days, with an average litter size of six, though the number fluctuates depending on coyote population density and the abundance of food.

- Coyote pups are born in dens, hollow trees, or under ledges.
- They are altricial, and are completely dependent on milk for their first 10 days. The incisors erupt at about 12 days, the canines at 16, and the second premolars at 21. Their eyes open after 10 days, by which point the pups become increasingly more mobile, walking by 20 days, and running at the age of six weeks.



Coyote pups at play in Estes Park. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes.

- The parents begin supplementing the pup’s diet with regurgitated solid food after 12–15 days. By the age of four to six weeks, when their milk teeth are fully functional, the pups are given small food items such as mice, rabbits, or pieces of ungulate carcasses, with lactation steadily decreasing after two months.
- Unlike wolf pups, coyote pups begin seriously fighting prior to engaging in play behavior. By three weeks of age, coyote pups bite each other with less inhibition than wolf pups.
- By the age of four to five weeks, pups have established dominance hierarchies, and are by then more likely to play rather than fight.

- The male plays an active role in feeding, grooming, and guarding the pups, but abandons them if the female goes missing before the pups are completely weaned. The den is abandoned by June to July, and the pups follow their parents in patrolling their territory and hunting.
- Pups may leave their families in August, though can remain for much longer. The pups attain adult dimensions at eight months, and gain adult weight a month later.

The information below is published regularly by Jefferson County and can be found on their [website](#).

Why are they here?

Residential areas provide habitat for coyotes. Plentiful food sources exist, such as mice, rabbits and voles. These small animals feed on birdseed, berries and garbage, which are commonly found and easily accessible. Shelter and water can be found in landscaped parks and yards.



Photo by Marilyn Rhodes.

Space is plentiful throughout parks, trails and natural areas. As coyotes have adapted to the presence of humans, they have lost their natural fear of us.

Coyotes are attracted to neighborhoods due to the availability of garbage, pet food and even pets, which coyotes see as prey. The following list illustrates some of the attractants that draw coyotes close to people. Remove these attractants to discourage coyotes from visiting your property:

- Outdoor pet food or water
- Birdseed or food sources that attract small mammals
- Accessible garbage or compost
- Fallen fruit or berries from trees or shrubs
- Shrubs, woodpiles, decks or any other structure that can provide cover or be used as a den
- Dogs and cats allowed to roam free, and/or female dogs in heat

Discourage a Coyote's Approach

Every citizen can help both people and coyotes by taking action to re-instill them with a healthy and natural fear of people. Clap your hands, yell, honk an airhorn or throw small rocks or sticks when you see coyotes so they can relearn to avoid humans.

- Be as big and loud as possible
- Wave your arms, clap and throw objects at the coyote
- Shout in a loud and authoritative voice
- Do not run or turn your back on the coyote
- Face the coyote and back away slowly

When are Coyotes a Risk to You?

Although naturally curious, coyotes are usually timid animals and normally run away if confronted. Coyote attacks on humans are rare. In many cases these attacks occur as a result of people feeding coyotes. Coyotes have adequate food supplies and are capable of surviving in the city without our help. A coyote that associates humans with food may become demanding and aggressive. Habituation can cause coyotes to lose their healthy and natural fear of people, become territorial and sometimes aggressive. Coloradoans can share the landscape with these wild neighbors by following three important tips:

- Don't feed wildlife!
- Protect your pets!
- Haze coyote when you see them!

Teach Your Children

- Never approach wild animals or dogs you don't know!
- If a coyote approaches you, wave your arms, stomp your feet and tell it loudly to go away!
- Call for help
- If the animal doesn't leave, walk out of the area, keeping the animal in your sight.

If a Coyote Attacks a Human

In the case of a coyote attack on a human, call 911. The sheriff's office will respond and will notify the Colorado Parks and Wildlife so that they can track and/or destroy the animal.

How Can you Protect your Pet?

Coyotes may view domestic pets as a food source, and large dogs as a threat or possible mate. Coyotes have taken pets from backyards, open spaces and even right off the leash. Keep your pet current on vaccinations. Reduce the risk to your pet by following these guidelines:

Cat Owners

The only way to guarantee your cat’s safety is to keep it indoors. Outdoor cats also face potential death from cars, diseases, foxes, parasites, raccoons, dogs and birds of prey, such as owls.

Dog Owners

- Always supervise your pet outside, especially at dawn and dusk.
- Keep your dog on a short leash while recreating – avoid retractable leashes.
- Do not allow your dog off leash.
- Do not allow your dog to play or interact with a coyote.
- If possible, pick up your dog when coyotes are visible.
- Avoid known or potential den sites and thick vegetation. Like domestic dogs, coyotes will defend their territory and their young.
- If you must leave your dog outside, secure it in a fully enclosed kennel.

If You Have an Incident with a Coyote

If a coyote attacks your pet, or if you have an unexpected encounter with a coyote in which the animal appears aggressive, please report the incident to **Animal Control** at **303-271-5070** or

303-277-0211 after normal business hours.

A coyote that bites a person must be destroyed. By feeding coyotes you put yourself, the neighborhood and coyotes at risk. **It is unlawful to feed or intentionally attract coyotes in Jefferson County [CPW regulation #021].**

Report people feeding coyotes to **Colorado Parks and Wildlife** at **303-291-7227**.