

Coyote Management: An Integrated Approach

By Tony McBride, Principal Biologist

“Division of Fish and Wildlife, may I help you?”

“Yes, I’d like to report a wolf-like animal that just walked through my yard.”

“It was probably a coyote, where do you live?”

“We have coyotes in New Jersey?”

“Yes, they occur in all 21 counties.”

“I didn’t know that, when will you come out to trap it?”

“We will respond if the animal has caused damage or is acting aggr...”

“But there are children in this neighborhood!”

population is increasing. However, reports of coyote damage have remained fairly stable in recent years. Although coyotes are fairly common, they do not cause a great deal of physical damage. Most calls fielded by WSS staff involve questions or fears about what a coyote *might* do.

Coyotes are typically secretive animals not often seen or heard. Yet there are times during the year when they are more visible and more vocal. Although usually nocturnal, coyotes can be seen any time of day, especially during the breeding season from late January into early March. Vocalizations, consisting of howls, yips and barks, also increase at this time.

In 2002, coyotes in Denville, Morris County became very vocal during the breeding season and were frequently spotted in suburban areas during the day. Coyotes were also sighted near a school playground at this time, which concerned many residents. As a deterrent, WSS staff used a predator caller to lure in a group of coyotes from a wooded area adjacent to the

school, then hazed them with pyrotechnics. Fish and Wildlife then followed up with an educational presentation about coyotes to over 200 concerned Denville residents.

In late winter of 2005, Lower Township in Cape May County was the site of a fatal coyote attack on a poodle. Coyotes became very visible and vocal at this time, and WSS staff fielded several complaints. Fish and Wildlife worked in the area attempting to call in and shoot the marauding animals, but were unsuccessful. WSS personnel again conducted an information session for concerned

residents from the area. Fatal attacks on dogs are not reported very often in New Jersey. Cats are more often victims of coyote attacks, especially free-ranging and feral cats.

Coyotes occasionally attack and consume livestock and poultry. Several times each year reports are received of coyote attacks on sheep. Coyotes typically kill sheep by biting down on the animal’s throat and windpipe and then hanging on until the sheep suffocates. Coyotes are efficient sheep killers and a farmer rarely knows his sheep were attacked at night until the carcasses are discovered the following morning. In fact, the farmer’s dogs will often sleep through the incident.

Coyote attacks on livestock typically peak during two times of the year. Spring is the first peak when coyotes are busy providing food for their young. At this time, sheep are especially attractive to coyotes as a food source because they are easy to kill and provide plentiful food for the growing pups. The second rise in livestock attacks occurs in the fall when parent coyotes are teaching their pups how to hunt. Skills learned dragging down sheep in the fall by the young coyotes are used in the spring to take deer fawns.

Coyote attacks on humans are rare in the northeast. The only recorded coyote attack on a human in New Jersey occurred in September 1999. A Boonton Township, Morris County woman was walking several dogs when a coyote attacked the dogs. The woman fell during the struggle and broke her leg. The coyote then approached her and bit her on the arm and did not run away until an onlooker beat the coyote with a stick.

Coyote nuisance and damage situations are managed using an integrated approach. This means that several methods are employed to achieve the maximum effect and reduce the likelihood of continued problems. These control measures include offering the complainant technical advice on which preventative measures can be taken to make a property less hospitable to coyotes. Technical advice includes how to install or fortify fencing to prevent access by coyotes and how to use sound deterrent devices or motion lights to scare coyotes. The WSS also uses either trapping or calling and shooting



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Eastern coyotes differ from their western counterparts with a larger average size and various color phases, including blonde and black. This black female is from Worthington State Forest, Warren County.

This conversation is typical of many calls received on coyotes and coyote damage by the Wildlife Services Section (WSS) of the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The WSS fields thousands of calls every year concerning many wildlife species which come into contact with people. On average, the WSS receives about 100 coyote-related calls annually, with the majority of calls from concerned people seeing a coyote for the first time.

The latest statewide coyote population estimate from Fish and Wildlife’s Furbearer Research Project is 3,000 animals and the



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The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is home to this blonde male coyote. It is theorized that past interbreeding between gray wolves and coyotes may be responsible for the larger size and color variations in our eastern coyote.

when necessary to offer relief from individual problem animals.

Several preventive measures can be taken to reduce coyote-human interactions and the likelihood of continued problems with nuisance coyotes. Since coyotes are opportunistic feeders, removing potential food sources such as garbage and birdfeed will keep coyotes looking elsewhere for sustenance. Pets should not be fed outdoors.

Homeowners are also advised to keep their yards well manicured. Coyotes feed primarily on small mammals such as rabbits, mice and voles. Backyard debris or wood piles, as well as weedy and shrubby areas, can harbor these prey animals that attract coyotes.

Coyotes can be discouraged with motion lights outside homes. Leaving radios on at night also deters them. Sheep owners are advised to keep a well-maintained, electrified fence to prevent coyotes from entering the enclosure. Devices are available with lights and sirens that cycle periodically during the night and can be placed in sheep pastures to deter coyotes.

For situations where coyotes are actively returning to a farm to kill sheep, or are behaving aggressively towards people, the WSS will respond to the scene and use a predator call to attract the marauding animals. Depending on the situation, approaching coyotes are either shot with a firearm or hazed with pyrotechnics to frighten them from the area and discourage their return. Farmers may also destroy coyotes when they are found attacking sheep or causing other damage.

As the population increases, coyote sightings will become more common. Sightings alone should not cause alarm but are a signal to take the preventive measures described here. Significant damage and nuisance coyote problems should be reported to the Wildlife Services Section at (908) 735-8793. 🐾