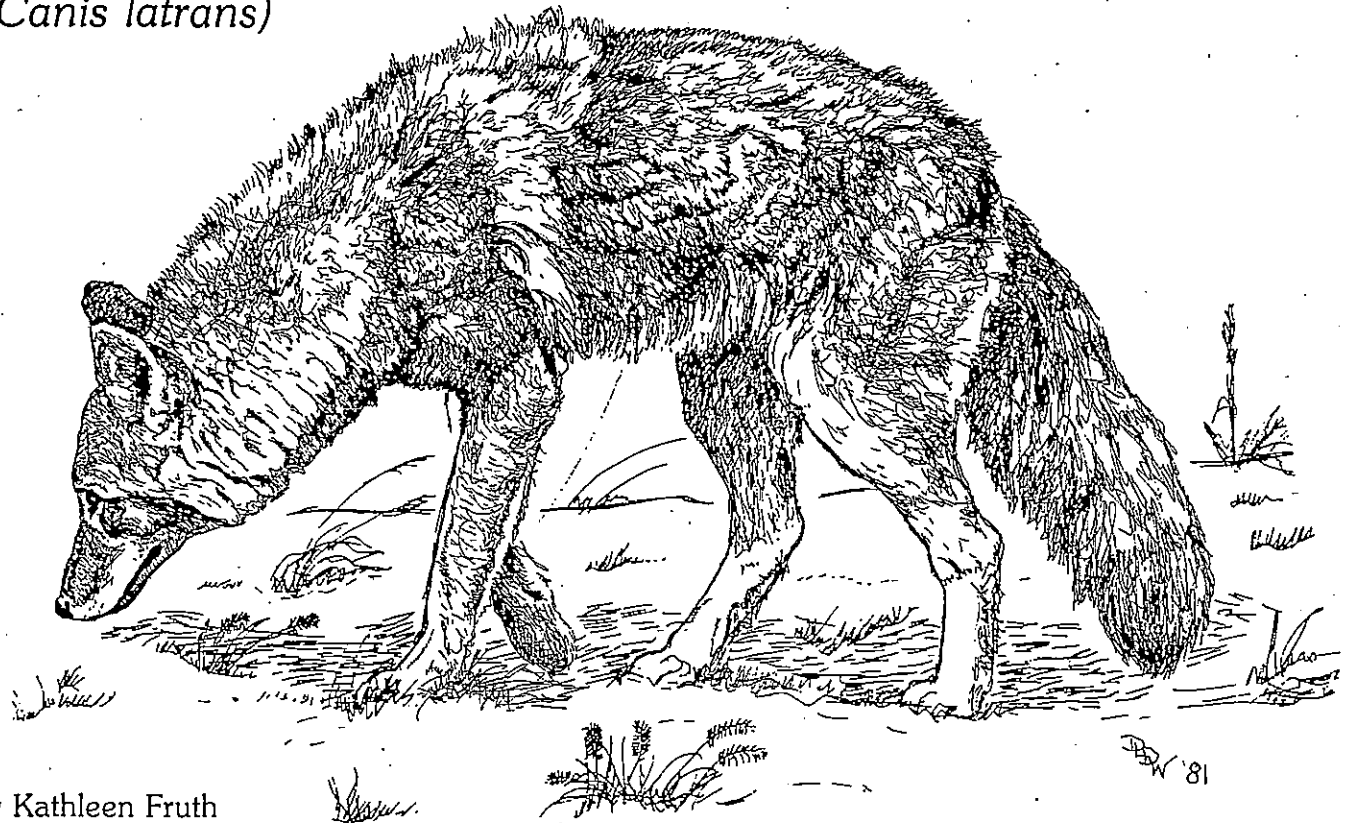


THE COYOTE

(*Canis latrans*)



By Kathleen Fruth

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Wildlife Management

PUBL-WM-148 86
November 1986

Description

The coyote is midway in size between a fox and a wolf. An adult male is about 44-52 inches long, including its 14 inch tail, and weighs from 25 to 42 pounds. The female coyote is about 1/5 smaller in size and weight.

Long, thin legs, a tapered muzzle and rather large, pointed ears characterize this member of the dog family. The coyote's black-tipped bushy tail, which comprises about a third of the body length, is carried below the level of the back when the coyote is running. Wolves, on the other hand, hold their tail up while running.

The basic body color of the coyote ranges from a dull yellow to gray. The fur on the upper part of the body, such as the back, neck, front of the legs, and top of the tail, usually is buff-gray. Black-tipped hairs give these parts a darker grizzled appearance than the cream-colored fur on the coyote's underparts. The face and backs of the

ears are redder than the rest of the body and do not look grizzled. The inside of the ears, the edges of the mouth and the throat are white.

Coyotes have yellow-colored eyes like foxes; however, coyote pups differ from fox pups by the shape of their pupils. The pupils of coyote pups are round while fox pup pupils are elliptical.

Reproduction

In Wisconsin, mating usually occurs between February and March. Although the same coyote pairs may breed for many years in a row, they do not mate for life. Coyotes are able to reproduce at 1 year of age.

The gestation period is 60-63 days long and a litter of 5-7 pups is usually born during April. The pups are born in a concealed den consisting of 2 or more tunnels leading to a 3-4 foot deep hole in the ground.

hares are usually chased down by one individual or sometimes by several coyotes cooperating together as a pack. Pack hunting is the method by which large prey such as deer are pursued.

Coyote predation on livestock in Wisconsin is minimal. As long as wild prey is available, the coyote tends to stay away from livestock. The coyote's food habits help dispose of numerous carcasses and keep small rodent populations in check. These benefits emphasize the coyote's value in the wildlife community.

Habits and Habitat

The coyote is an intelligent and highly adaptable animal. While the ranges of all other mammalian predators have shrunk with the expansion of humans, the coyote's distribution has expanded throughout North America. Unlike its relative the wolf, the coyote has been able to adapt to humans to the point where some coyotes live at the edge of or even within urban areas such as Milwaukee or Madison.

The preferred habitat for coyotes in Wisconsin includes forests, woodland edges, and sometimes dry marsh or prairie if this cover contains thickets of brush or tall vegetation. Although Wisconsin coyotes seem to prefer habitat with adequate cover, coyotes in southeastern Wisconsin have been known to hunt, eat, sleep and even den in cultivated fields.

Coyote home ranges depend on such factors as cover, food availability, season, social structure, age, and sex. In Wisconsin, coyote home ranges are generally 5 to 10 square miles in size.

Coyotes are very sociable animals and frequently play with each other. Besides hunting in small packs, they will gather to feed on carrion or just play. Coyotes advertise their location with smells and sounds such as howling or yapping. Urine, feces, and glandular scents are left by coyotes to mark territories during the denning season.

Coyotes serve as hosts for pests such as lice, fleas, mites, and ticks. Mites cause sarcoptic mange, which result in loss of hair, weakness and ultimately death. Diseases like rabies and canine parvovirus also plague Wisconsin coyote populations. Parasites such as tapeworms and round worms are carried by coyotes.

History in Wisconsin

Coyotes were already present in Wisconsin before settlers arrived. Various reports indicate that at one time coyotes were highly abundant in the

southern part of the state. A news report in 1866 indicated that a coyote had been caught within Milwaukee city limits.

Coyotes were hunted vigorously in the late 1800's and early 1900's both for sport and because they were considered vermin and pests. While coyote numbers in the south decreased significantly, their numbers in the north increased. Year-round hunting with no bag limits still exists today, but a defined trapping season was instituted in 1981 to reduce the numbers of bobcat, fox, and fisher caught in coyote traps that were set year-round. Bounties were paid on coyotes in the past, but this method is not an effective management tool for any species.

Current Status

Coyotes are present in each county in Wisconsin, but today most of the estimated 14,000 animals are found in the northern half of the state. Observations of coyotes reported in the 1970's-80's indicated that the coyote population is expanding to the south. Evidently, coyotes are adapting to southern agricultural habitats, so coyote numbers are once again on the rise in southern Wisconsin (Fig. 2).

An estimated 2,865 coyotes were harvested during the 1984-85 season. The average pelt price for this season was \$13.44, but as with all furbearers, pelt price fluctuates from year to year according to supply and demand (Fig. 3).



Figure 2. Distribution of coyotes in Wisconsin.