

COYOTES

Common questions and answers

What do coyotes look like?

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are members of the Canine family and can closely resemble large dogs. They have long, thin legs, a tapered muzzle, and large, pointed ears. Fur ranges in color from a dull yellow to gray. An adult male coyote will measure about four feet long, including its long, black-tipped, bushy tail, and can weigh between 25 and 42 pounds (females are smaller in size and weight).

For the first time, I'm seeing or hearing about coyotes in my community. Is the population increasing?

This is difficult to determine because we do not have census data on coyotes in Wisconsin. However, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) does receive reports of coyote sightings and the number of reports is increasing. It is uncertain if we are receiving more reports due to an increase in the population, the continual expansion of development of rural areas, or as a response to media reports of alleged coyote-related incidents. A combination of all these factors most likely contributes to this increase in coyote reports.

Where will coyotes most likely be found?

Coyotes prefer woodland edges and brushy areas that provide adequate cover; however, they are very adaptable. Coyotes will be found using farm fields, parkways, riverways, parks and other areas with natural vegetation and are common within city limits and residential developments. Keep in mind that they routinely travel within their territories --part of which may include your back yard.

What role does the coyote play in nature?

Coyotes are extremely versatile predators and scavengers. They primarily feed on rabbits, small rodents, and animal carcasses but will also eat birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and a variety of vegetation. White-tailed deer carcasses are a principal food source for the coyote in Wisconsin. They do not commonly prey upon deer, although they are capable of taking fawns and weakened adults.

As with any predator-prey relationship, coyotes help keep their prey populations healthy and in balance with the environment. In agricultural areas coyote predation helps reduce crop damage caused by rodents. Carcass consumption by coyotes helps to prevent the spread of disease within wildlife populations.

Will coyotes attack humans?

Coyotes are typically not aggressive toward humans and are generally fearful of them. In areas of southeastern Wisconsin, as in other areas where coyotes are not hunted or trapped due to local ordinances, this fear of humans is reduced. As a result, they may not flee immediately upon observing humans.

Will a coyote attack my dog or cat?

When the coyote's natural food is plentiful it seldom preys upon domestic animals. Coyotes are territorial and may perceive domestic dogs as a threat and they will defend their food base, denning locations, offspring, etc. Coyotes will also prey upon domestic cats.

Pet owners should exercise caution and avoid leaving their pets outside unattended between dusk and dawn when coyotes are most active. Use a leash when walking dogs, especially during late winter and early spring when coyotes are denning and pups could be present.

What should I do if I see coyotes?

As with any wildlife you should keep your distance. Observing coyotes can be an exciting, educational experience. However, if you feel a coyote is too close for comfort take some actions that will instill and reinforce its fear of humans: turn on outside lights, make loud noises, toss stones or other small objects. Although the response may not be immediate, coyotes will flee.

Do coyotes carry parasites and disease?

In addition to being hosts for mites, fleas, ticks, lice, flatworms and roundworms coyotes can carry a variety of diseases including rabies, canine parvovirus and canine distemper. Pet owners should keep their pet's vaccinations up-to-date to prevent any complications from contact with any infected wild animal or their secretions and excretions. If you observe a coyote that appears sick, contact your local law enforcement or DNR office.

How are coyote populations managed?

Current coyote population management includes a year-round firearm season and specified trapping season. However, these methods are difficult to implement in urban areas due to local ordinances that prohibit hunting and trapping.

How is the DNR responding to concerns regarding coyotes in urban areas?

We encourage people with questions and concerns to contact their local DNR office ~~or the Animal Damage Control office at 1-800-433-6688~~. We will also work with local communities if they want to explore options to manage coyote populations.

How can I learn more about coyotes?

In addition to the attached DNR Life Tracks Series publication *The Coyote*, an abundance of literature is available at local libraries and bookstores. General information can be obtained through field guides for mammal identification (eg. Audubon series, Peterson series, etc.). Detailed and more specific information is available in a variety of textbooks including Mammals of Wisconsin by H.T. Jackson; and Coyotes: Biology, Behavior, and Management by M. Bekoff.

***For more information contact your local Department of Natural Resources office,
or call the Milwaukee office at 414/ 263-8615 or 263-8710***