



# Coexisting with Coyotes

Coyotes have joined the ranks of urban wildlife. They inhabit all North America and virtually every neighborhood. Despite numerous efforts to eliminate coyotes, their population has not been reduced – they are here to stay. Let’s look at some facts. The takeaway points will be: coyotes will not approach humans unless taught to do so, issues with pets can be understood and averted, coyotes use behavior and biology mechanisms for survival, and killing coyotes will not solve any issues. What we will cover is: coyotes, humans, pets, and killing coyotes.

## Coyotes

Coyotes are small, social, territorial wild dogs, native only to the Americas. Let’s get to know them. Coyotes generally weigh 20 – 40 pounds. Long winter fur makes these rangy, whippet-sized animals appear larger than they really are. Coyotes are intelligent, social, and complex. Just like humans, each coyote has his own individual personality. And coyotes are interesting! Did you know they put out fires? Not big ones but they will bat small embers with their paws or roll on a small flame in an attempt to put it out. Did you know that coyotes can climb trees? Coyotes are excellent swimmers! Affection between family members is displayed openly. They mate for life. They are devoted to their families and are model parents worthy of admiration. The kids like to play together. Chasing a tail is another form of play. Adults like to play together, too. In fact, the whole family likes to play together. Time together is a priority - family bonds are strong. Mom often needs “free time” away from the family, but will keep close watch from a high point not too far away. They experience many of our own emotions, such as dejection and sadness when an invitation to play is rejected or sadness and pain when mom loves someone else best. Jealousy and competition for mom’s affection are not uncommon – mom is in the middle. There is sibling rivalry in coyote families – the kids like to squabble. They patiently wait for one another to go trekking – it’s one of their all-important daily activities. They’ll often

search for one another to do things together. Curiosity and inquisitiveness are signature characteristics. Coyotes enjoy watching dogs from a distance – it’s like TV. This does not mean they are planning an “attack.” They move and mark poisoned dead rats as a warning to other family members: coyotes watch out for each other. One will often groom the other even taking unhealthy ticks off the other. Care strengthens bonds.

Clarifying the term coyote pack means that a pack of coyotes is a family unit consisting of parents, older kids from previous litters, and the young of the year. It is not the same as a “pack of dogs” which are feral individuals that have banded together as a marauding “gang.” Coyote family units are similar to humans in their care, affection, and time together as a family. Coyote dads help tremendously with raising the young. Coyotes are social animals; the family is their strongest unit. From day one, dad helps care for the family - he brings food for mom while she nurses the pups. The alpha pair, the parents, are the only adults that reproduce in any coyote pack, which limits the number of litters to just one or fewer a year. Other adults, the older siblings, help raise the young. Although litter size can be six or more, many pups do not make it to adulthood. Population size is kept stable. Killing them disrupts the stability. Discipline maintains order in a coyote family. It’s how youngsters learn. They get old and arthritic, hard of hearing, and hard of seeing. Coyotes constantly communicate with each other through eye contact, body language, and facial expressions. They leave messages for one another and others. They howl to keep in touch over a distance but also they howl along with sirens and they howl in distress when chased by a dog. Each coyote can produce several pitches. This explains why two coyotes may sound like several and three coyotes may sound like eight or ten!

Where do coyotes go and what do they do? They pass through neighborhoods, visiting hunting areas in open spaces, and marking their territories as a message to other coyotes. They hunt mostly for rodents, which compose the bulk of their diet.

Clarifying the term territoriality is protecting one's space because of limited resources exists in many species, including our own. A coyote's territory is an area claimed and used by a coyote family for its survival. The limited resources in any environmental area, necessarily limits the coyote population size living there. In addition to an area's limited resources, coyote territorial behavior further limits the number of coyotes in an area. By regularly traveling through and marking the areas they use, they keep more coyotes, interlopers and transients from moving in. To coyotes, dogs often seem like interloper and transient coyotes.

Coyotes help balance the environment. They actually control rat and mice populations by eating them. They prevent the spread of diseases by scavenging on rotting wildlife. Rabies in coyotes is rare. Only 0.2% of all reported rabies cases were coyotes in 2010. Coyotes mitigate rabies by predation on those species that carry the disease.

## Humans

While humans often get upset at simply seeing a coyote, coyotes will do their utmost to avoid humans. Coyotes are shy and wary. They do their best to avoid humans. They want to avoid conflicts as much as you do. They fear you more than you fear them. They will not approach a human unless taught to do so by someone's, not necessarily your own, feeding them. Never feed a coyote! Sometimes one may watch you. This does not mean it is challenging you. Seeing a coyote during daylight hours is not unusual and does not mean it is aggressive, bold, or sick. Coyotes don't like being around people so they've adapted primarily to dawn, dusk, and night hours. However, they are diurnal (daytime) animals and may be seen at any time of day. Most coyote "encounters" are just sightings. Often simply being seen can be considered a crime by people who perceive their presence as a threat – that they are the only species which has this distinction. Happenstance encounters do occur occasionally. The coyote will inevitably spook and flee but it may watch you first out of curiosity. Remember that they want to avoid you.

Coyotes visiting your yard – coyotes trek through areas to mark their territories so other coyotes won't move in and to visit other hunting areas. Don't attract coyotes specifically to your yard with food left out. If they frequent your yard, rotate large objects to dissuade them – coyotes are uneasy about novelty. Be fierce in shooing one out of your yard if you don't want it there or contact the wildlife conflict manager through [www.CoyoteCoexistence.com](http://www.CoyoteCoexistence.com) for help.

Coyotes and children – Coyotes are less fearful of critters smaller than themselves. Let's err on the side of caution. Young children should always be supervised for many reasons. Danger from two-legged predators, running into the street, or dog bites far outweigh risks from coyotes. Teach children never to approach a coyote, taunt it, or run away from it. If they see a coyote, they should go to an adult. The best "scare off" – one bloodcurdling extended scream, like Drew Barrymore in ET, will freak out any coyote and make it run for cover.

Risks of injury from a coyote are extremely rare. Here are some comparisons: 5,000 people a year get killed crossing a street; only 2 deaths of humans from coyotes have been recorded – ever (the deaths include a two-year old whose father was feeding a coyote); 1,000 dog bites a day send people to emergency rooms, and bites/scratches from coyotes to humans amount to 17 a year for all North America – almost all due to interfering in a dog/coyote encounter or feeding. There are few situations where a human has been nipped or scratched – by coming between a dog and a coyote in conflict; by feeding them, humans may teach coyotes to approach and demand food. NEVER FEED A COYOTE! Again, these incidents amount to only 17 cases per year for all of North America. There are still a few individuals who harbor fears based on

misinformation or no information. A biased and sensationalism-driven media feeds the fear. Minor precautions are important but the fear is unnecessary. In most cases, unless a coyote approaches your dog, you don't need to put a lot of effort or fierceness into shooing off a coyote.

Shooing off a coyote – coyote not approaching dog. Simply approaching while gazing directly in its eyes will make him move. To hurry things up, add action. Wave. Toss a pebble towards a coyote, not at it so as to harm it. Add noise. Clap. Slap a newspaper on your thigh, loudly. Yell: "git outa here." There is one extremely important caveat here: Coyotes must defend their young. If a coyote stands guard, it is almost assuredly because there are young around. It's best to move on rather than press the issue.

## Pets

Pets fall into two categories: Those involving coyote territoriality issues and those involving small pets as prey. Risks are minimal. Precautions are easy. Know how to shoo off a coyote from your pet. Note: In almost all instances, coyotes will simply flee if they see you or your dog approaching them. Coyote incidents statistically are not common but they have occurred and you should be prepared "just in case."

Territoriality. Coyotes instinctively protect their immediate family areas from all canine species. For example foxes, weighing only 13 pounds, are competitors for the same resources. They are also a threat to coyote puppies. Coyotes drive them out of their areas as they do intruder coyotes. By the same token, all dogs, no matter what their size, are seen as competitors for the same resources and as potential threats. Territorial issues often begin with negative communication, which can be read over great distances. All canines are constantly communicating through body language, eye contact, and facial expressions. Prevent negative communication by keeping a safe distance away, restraining your dog and moving on if you see a coyote.

Dog Behavior Triggers. Some dog behaviors elicit an automatic defensive reaction from coyotes: coming too close; negative communication with eye contact, body language, and facial expressions; too much hyperactivity. Coyotes feel challenged by these – they may be signs to a coyote of an intruder who wants to hang around and take over or explore the area for puppies.

Prevention in the first place is needed. Leashing and keeping your distance will prevent the opportunity for conflict to occur. If you are walking your dog and see a coyote, move on and away from the coyote. Prevent your dog from chasing coyotes. Almost all unleashed dogs chase coyotes. Once a dog has begun to chase, it may be difficult to call him back. An alpha coyote may chase back and message the dog with a nip. Coyotes remember who chased them. A small dog can be killed. A coyote may assume a "Halloween-Cat" pose as a defensive "messaging" if a dog gets too close. It is meant to look scary to get the message across: "leave me alone." Note: the arched back, hackles up, lips pulled back, teeth bared. Coyotes have several cat-like characteristics.

Territorial Behavior: Following. A coyote may follow a dog out of curiosity or to monitor it the same way you might follow a "suspect" prowling through your neighborhood to find out where it is going and what it is doing. Just keep walking away from the coyote – with your eye on it – and don't run. Running invites chasing. Shoo it off effectively if it gets too close and move on. It's a good idea to leash your dog and pick up a small dog.



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A coyote could approach your dog over territoriality. If a coyote ends up approaching a dog, it will do so with a series of charges and retreats and possibly – ultimately – with a nip to the haunches, tail or inner thigh. These are messages with unequivocal meaning. You need to interfere with intense shooing off at this point then leash your dog and quickly leave the area. A coyote approaching your dog needs to be shooed off fiercely. Throw a really loud tantrum and be aggressive: Remember the acronym NAAG, Noise- Action-Approach-Gaze.

Shooing off a coyote – approaching a dog. If a coyote approaches your dog, be fierce. Make it “memorable” so that it will be remembered. Be sure to make the coyote move back and away. Then it’s your turn to move on.

The number of dog/dog ego conflicts dwarfs the number of dog/coyote territorial conflicts. Only the coyote ones get reported, no matter how mild. Note: Nips are messages not aimed to maim. Coyotes try to never engage in a full fight with a dog. A coyote will not risk injury, which might compromise its ability to hunt or defend itself. Instead it messages. Coyote messages as nips or pinches to dogs are seldom to vulnerable parts where they might actually create a bad injury. Rather, it’s a messaging nip usually to the tail, rump, or soft inner thigh and knee. This is the best way a coyote can effectively communicate its needs – the message works. Note: Most dogs that have been nipped get the message. They stay away from coyotes and their dens.

Small pets look like prey. Coyotes don’t seek out pets but may take a small, unattended pet if the opportunity is there. They have no way of knowing who is your pet and who isn’t. They don’t discriminate between your pet and any other small wiggling creature they would see as prey. Scat (fecal) analyses show that small pets, pet food and human foods are minimal factors in urban diets. Always leash small pets, pick up small pets if you see a coyote and never leave pets unattended. Pets need to be protected from many dangers: 5.4 million cats are killed each year by cars; 1.2 million dogs are killed each year by cars; dog bites to other pets is the third largest injury to pets. Potential danger from a coyote is very minor. Simple precautions can avert all potential problems. Don’t let pets roam free. Supervise all pets out-of-doors, restrain pets in a coyote area, and pick up small pets if you see a coyote.

A note about habituation and hazing: Habituation is not necessarily a bad thing as long as a safe distance is kept. It’s normal development in urban coyotes. They grow accustomed to people by seeing them every day. You can’t stop it. This does not mean they will approach you. You don’t need to scare or “haze” a coyote every time you see one – they could get used to this and start ignoring it. If a coyote is not causing an issue, leave him alone. If a coyote comes too closely, simply walking towards him and waving your arms and clapping will get him to move.

## Killing Coyotes

Brutal slaughter continues today. It’s an endless cycle. Some hate has no bounds. The latest scientific research on coyote behavior and biology reveals: vacancies left by killed coyotes are soon filled by transient coyotes; killing causes more females to reproduce. Normally, only the alpha pair – the parents of the family – reproduce, limiting the number of



litters being born to only one every year or several years. This stabilizes population size but when more coyotes are killed, more females reproduce, not just the alpha parents, and more pups survive to adulthood because more food is available to them. Trapping and killing increases the potential for more negative encounters because in a nature-managed coyote population, adults teach youngsters the ropes of urban coexistence by example and with discipline. After killing, fewer adults remain to pass on the knowledge. Youngsters and newcomers then will have to learn the hard way, by trial and error, and through negative encounters with humans. Besides being ineffective, trapping is inhumane. Leg hold traps are brutal and barbaric: they crack bones and mutilate. That is why they are illegal in many states. Pets and unintended wildlife get caught often in the traps and suffer injury and death. Trappers lead people to believe they will “relocate” coyotes. In fact, in most states, it is illegal to release coyotes alive. Trappers may tell you that coyotes are “euthanized.” This is not true. Some get shot in the head, many after days in cages, with mutilated limbs and cracked bones, terrified and in excruciating pain, where urine is collected as a lure to trap the next hapless coyotes. After being shot, some coyotes are skinned and their pelts are sold to make coats abroad where it is not illegal. The most unlucky ones are transported to baiting and hunting clubs where escape is impossible. Terrified and displaced, they end up being mauled alive by packs of dogs.

The idea that coyotes are non-native and don’t belong to any particular area in North America is a bogus argument for killing them. Coyotes are native to the Americas and only to the Americas, where they have extended their range, a natural process, to every state except Hawaii. They live in Central park in New York City, they live under the “L” in Chicago, they live in most cities, usually in small natural areas.

It’s time for mankind to make peace with nature. Continual slaughter is neither a moral nor a sustainable solution and it runs counter to all we know about coyote biology and behavior. Let’s work on a win-win solution for humans and animals based on the latest scientific research. Community education about coexistence and guidelines have proven to be the most effective method to manage all urban coyote issues.

With the permission from [www.CoyoteCoexistence.com](http://www.CoyoteCoexistence.com), this article was adapted from the video *Coyotes as Neighbors: Focus on Facts* from [www.coyotecoexistence.com](http://www.coyotecoexistence.com). 🐾