

Coyote

Scientific Name: Canis latrans
AKA: American jackal, prairie wolf
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Canidae
Range: Alaska into Central America
Average life span in the wild: Up to 14 years



It is the coyote's resourcefulness that makes it such a remarkably successful species.

Physical Description

The coyote looks a lot like a lean German Shepherd. Colors range from gray to dark brown. A coyote has sharp pointed ears, a sharp pointed nose and long bushy tail. They range anywhere from 15-50 pounds. A coyote can reach 5-feet long, including the tail. Smaller coyotes found in deserts and low-lying areas weigh about 20 pounds while mountain coyotes can weigh as much as 50 pounds.



Coyotes have a keen sense of sight, smell and hearing, which allow them to survive in many different areas. Coyotes are known for their bone-chilling howls that seem to make the night less inviting. The calls simultaneously serve as territorial warnings to other coyotes while mating.

Coyotes are cunning opportunists and tricksters which allows them to survive where other species are experiencing declines. Coyotes range across North America, thriving in desert, coastal, and mountainous regions. They can occupy a range of up to 12 miles. Coyotes are common in most of Orange County.

Habit & Diet

Food is what makes the coyote's habitat. Wherever the food is, that is where the coyote needs to be. Coyotes are omnivorous animals, taking advantage of a wide variety of food resources. They are known to hunt day and night, either alone or in packs. Although the coyote has been observed killing sheep, poultry and other livestock, it prefers mice, rabbits, ground squirrels, other small rodents, insects, even reptiles, and fruits and berries of wild plants. Timid around humans, coyotes areas are known to pick off small dogs and cats or go through human garbage for a snack.



Coyote attacks on people are extremely rare. There have been a small number of attacks in the U.S. and Canada, with most of the attacks involving small children under 5 years of age. Since 3 million children are bitten by dogs every year, a child is more likely to be hurt by a dog than by a coyote.

Natural History

The coyote evolved in North America during the Pleistocene epoch 1.81 million years ago. Its range has expanded in the wake of human civilization, and coyotes readily reproduce in metropolitan areas.



Coyotes are monogamous; they find a partner for life. They reach sexual maturity after 1 year. The gestation period is 63 days and litters range from 1 to 19 pups. Pups are born blind. Only 5-20% of coyote pups survive their first year.

Coyotes are generally active throughout the day, with activity peaking at dawn and dusk. They may also be active at night, especially in cities where they feel safer after dark.



Sampling of Coyote sightings in O.C.,
 Courtesy of Orange County Register, Nov. 9, 2009

Within the last century, the coyote population numbers have increased and their range has expanded, even though coyotes have been trapped, shot and poisoned by the thousands.

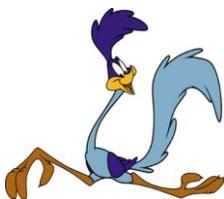
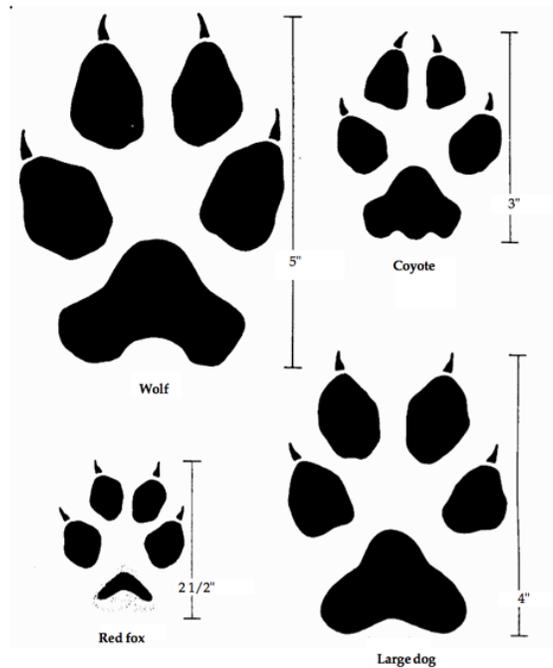
The "trickster" knows how to prosper in the face of adversity. Wildlife biologists have observed that when coyotes' numbers decline, they react by having larger litters. This reproductive strategy safeguards against extermination.

While coyotes have adapted well to living near people, they are generally shy animals, and would prefer to avoid confrontations with people. That's why even though there may be a coyote or two in your neighborhood, you may never see one in person.



References

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