

Coexisting with Coyotes and Foxes

The following topics will be discussed on this page:

- I just saw a coyote/fox during the day – doesn't that mean he is rabid?
- Will coyotes/foxes attack my children or pets?
- Do coyotes/foxes hunt in packs?
- How do I keep coyotes/foxes out of my yard?
- How do I keep coyotes/foxes out of my chicken coop?
- How do I protect my newborn lambs and calves from coyotes?
- There is a coyote/fox den near my property – what do I do?
- Why can't I just trap coyotes/foxes out of my area?



Coyote

NATURAL HISTORY

Both coyotes and foxes are members of the *canid* family. Coyotes look similar to medium-sized dogs, and are often confused with Huskies. Foxes are slightly smaller, and have long bodies and relatively short legs. There are five species of foxes in North America, but only two – the red and the gray – are found in urban settings. Interestingly, due to color variations in foxes, gray foxes can look quite red, and red foxes can be gray colored! The most accurate way to tell a red fox from a gray fox is by looking at the **tail**: red foxes have a *white tip* at the end of their tail, gray foxes do not.

Coyotes and foxes are both opportunistic: they can exploit a wide range of habitats, feast on a variety of natural and human-supplied foods, and, if necessary, adapt their activity periods to times when humans are not active. Despite being one of the most successful urban mammals, many people are surprised to see a coyote or fox in their backyard – and that surprise often leads to panic. The good news is that there really is not much to worry about!



Red Fox

Q: I just saw a coyote/fox during the day – doesn't that mean he is rabid?

A: It is actually *not* unusual to see a coyote or fox out during the day. Coyotes and foxes will venture out during daylight hours in search of food. Both animals are opportunistic feeders, meaning they will hunt for food as the opportunity presents itself – regardless of day or night. Additionally, both coyotes and foxes eat squirrels, and squirrels are only active during the day! So, if you see a fox or coyote outside during the day, he is most likely in pursuit of a squirrel, small rodent, or other daytime food source.

Sometimes people are alarmed because a coyote or fox exhibits a "brazenness" that is alarming. This does *not* necessarily mean that the animal is sick. Coyotes and foxes may habituate to humans because of food sources being constantly available (i.e. cat food left on porches) or repeated contact with no negative consequences. You can teach a bold coyote or fox to be wary of you and other people by using negative conditioning. Make loud, scary noises by

banging metal pot tops together when the animal is nearby, or spray the animal's hindquarters with a hose.

Call your local animal control officer or police if an adult coyote or fox seen in daytime is acting at all sick or showing abnormal behaviors such as partial paralysis, circling, staggering as if drunk or disoriented, self-mutilating, or exhibiting unprovoked aggression or unnatural tameness. While waiting for animal control personnel, keep people and companion animals away from the animal.

Q: Will coyotes/foxes attack my children or pets?

A: Neither the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nor local and state health departments have classified coyotes or foxes as a human safety risk. Coyote attacks on people are extremely rare – and ironically that is why they are highly publicized the few times they do happen. On the other hand, according to the CDC, over 330,000 people visit the emergency room each year for treatment of a dog bite-related injury, yet we do not see fit to banish dogs from homes. Thus, it is essential to put risk in its proper context, which is why, statistically speaking, the risk of coyote harm to humans is practically nil.

Most, if not all, of the few coyote bites that occur nationally each year are directly related to coyotes being fed by humans, whether intentional or not. As a result, it is important to take proactive measures and ensure that there are no human-produced food sources, such as garbage or pet food, on your property that will entice coyotes with a quick and easy meal (*see below for further information*).

Although coyotes will *occasionally* prey on free-roaming cats and small dogs, the fear of coyotes or foxes eating pets is greatly exaggerated. Many more dogs and cats meet the unfortunate fate of being struck by an automobile. Coyotes and foxes seek out the type of prey that will give them the greatest reward with minimal risk of injury to themselves. As a result, their favored prey include small mammals such as rabbits, mice, rats, and squirrels, as well as human-produced food such as garbage, cat or dog food. Coyotes and foxes also eat insects, fruits and berries.

Regardless, common sense tells us that dogs, cats and young children never should be allowed outside unsupervised, whether the danger be from an automobile, another animal, or even mean-spirited people!



Coyote

Q: Do coyotes/foxes hunt in packs?

A: No. Coyotes and foxes do form small family groups that share territories, but both species are normally solitary hunters, although they may sometimes hunt in pairs. Interestingly, howling is often a group exercise for coyotes. However, there is no need to be alarmed if you hear the distinctive coyote howl; it merely functions as a communication between individuals or as a method for staking out territorial claims.

Q: How do I keep coyotes/foxes out of my yard?

A: You can prevent coyotes and foxes from visiting your yard by taking a few simple precautions: keep your garbage in a secure container, and only put it outside on the morning of pick-up; do not put any meat scraps in compost heaps; do not leave any pet food outside over night; restrict the use of bird seed – coyotes are attracted to it and the birds and rodents that use the feeder; pick up fallen fruit from underneath trees; and cut back brush around your property that provides cover for coyotes or their prey.

If you have a fenced-in yard, the *Coyote Roller* (available from Roll Guard, 619-977-6031 or www.coyoteroller.com) is an effective device for keeping dogs in and coyotes out. The *Coyote Roller* is a free-standing cylinder that attaches to the

top of a fence, and literally “rolls” any animal off who is attempting to climb over.



Coyote

Q: How do I keep coyotes/foxes out of my chicken coop?

A: Small domestic livestock only make up a small percentage of coyote and fox diets, and are usually only preyed upon when other food sources are scarce. The only way to protect your chickens is to reinforce your chicken coop so the coyotes or foxes cannot gain access. Heavy gauge welded wire should be used and another layer of finer mesh put over it to prevent coyotes, foxes, or other animals from being able to reach through. Although reinforcing a pen may be a temporary inconvenience, once an animal pen is well reinforced and maintained, there will be no more problems.

Q: How do I protect my newborn lambs and calves from coyotes?

A: First, it is important to determine that coyotes are the animals to blame for any predation on livestock that you have noticed. Coyotes are scavengers, and the presence of their tracks around a dead animal does not necessarily mean that they were responsible for the kill. A few signs of coyote predation include bite marks and bleeding on the head and neck of the dead animal, and signs of struggle such as trampled vegetation.

You can protect newborn livestock by confining pregnant animals and their young during birthing season. You can also use guard dogs, llamas or burros to protect your animals. Although not foolproof, fencing is the best option if you have large, open pastures. To effectively exclude coyotes, construct a fence at least 5-1/2 feet high, using 4"x6" or smaller woven or welded wire fencing, and place a barbed wire across the top and bottom of the fence. The barbed wire will prevent the coyotes from being able to jump over, or dig under the fence.



Fox pups

Q: There is a coyote/fox den near my property – what do I do?

A: People are often surprised to discover a coyote or fox den near their property, with fox dens being the more common of the two. Again, the mere presence of a den is nothing to be concerned about. Foxes tend to start denning during the breeding season (March-April), and usually abandon the den by the end of the season.

The only “problem” you may encounter is period of several weeks when the kits are old enough to feel adventurous but are left unattended while the parents go off in search of food. The kits may look and act like puppies, and you may see them tumbling and romping in play throughout your yard. As cute as the kits are, it is important that you *do not* feed the kits or initiate contact, or the kits may lose their fear of humans and that will ultimately lead to their demise. Instead, you should bang metal pot tops together to create a loud noise, which will scare the kits and teach them to associate

humans with a negative stimulus.

If a coyote or fox den absolutely *must* be moved out of an area due to impending danger to the animals (ex: the den is located near a construction site), harassment strategies will encourage the animals to abandon their den. Place dirty, smelly sweaty socks, or rags sprinkled with a strong-smelling household cleaner such as ammonia, into the entrance to the den. All of these strategies tend to make the coyotes or foxes uncomfortable and encourage them to find a new den site. However, keep in mind that it is not an easy task to find and excavate a suitable denning site, so the foxes may try hard to stay at their original location for lack of a better place to go.

Remember, the presence of a coyote or fox den near your property does not present danger to yourself, your family or companion animals. The inhabitants of the den should only be encouraged to leave if there is a risk of impending danger *to the denning animals*. After learning that their fear was misplaced, many people come to find that having a coyote or fox den near their property is actually one of the best photo opportunities they can have. So pick up a camera, and "shoot!"

Q: Why can't I just trap coyotes/foxes out of my area?

A: Many state fish and game departments require that a person obtain a special permit to trap coyotes or foxes, and few will issue such permit because of the mere presence of coyotes or foxes in an area. That aside, human killing of coyotes for predator control has ironically been a major factor in the increase of the coyote's home range; as coyotes are persecuted in one area, their adaptability allows them to make use of a new area. Additionally, for both coyotes and foxes, as well as most other "harvested" animals, population "control" tends to have the opposite effect; coyotes and foxes compensate for the artificial reduction in their population by breeding at an earlier age and having larger litters. In addition, more young will survive because of the increase in availability of food sources.

It is much easier, and more effective, to simply remove any potential attractants from your property, which will keep coyotes and foxes at a distance, and realize that they are valuable members of your urban landscape!