

# COYOTES IN COOK COUNTY

## Facts and Management Strategies

Coyotes have become much more visible in the metropolitan area in recent years. Unfortunately, conflicts between people and coyotes have also increased. In 2000, the Cook County Animal & Rabies Control Agency joined forces with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, and Ohio State University to create the Cook County Coyote Research Project. Our researchers study local coyotes, develop strategies to address public concerns and provide information about this animal to the public.



While the research component of this project continues, we have gathered enough information to make some valuable assessments about how people and coyotes can cohabit as safely as possible in Cook County.

## What are coyotes?

Coyotes are members of the dog family, which also includes wolves and foxes. They are typically medium-sized, weighing between 30 and 35 pounds, but their long legs and thick fur can make them look larger.

## Where do coyotes come from?

Coyotes are native to Illinois. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, urban and agricultural development had largely wiped them out from the region. In recent years, however, coyotes have returned and are now frequently seen in metro Cook County as well as many other urban and suburban areas throughout the United States.

## What do urban coyotes eat?

The diet of our urban coyotes varies, depending on location and season. Major food items include rodents, rabbits, deer (probably from roadkill) and fruit. Our research shows that it is very uncommon for coyotes to eat trash or other food associated with people, and it appears to be rare for the animals to forage from garbage cans.



A coyote fitted with a radiocollar.

## Do coyotes live in packs?

Many coyotes live in family groups of two to six members. The territorial areas of groups are relatively small, and groups defend their territories from other coyote groups. Other coyotes are solitary, moving across large areas of land waiting for territories to become available or seeking their own home territory. Both solitary coyotes and small groups occur throughout most of Cook County, and all animals seem to prefer tracts of undeveloped land.

## How long do coyotes live?

Coyotes in Cook County have a 50% chance of living through a year, with few coyotes living to adulthood. The greatest cause of mortality is collisions with vehicles. Coyotes carry few diseases that impact people, and disease also appears to play a minimal role in animal mortality.





A litter of coyote pups in Cook County

### Are coyotes dangerous?

Our research shows that most coyotes avoid people, and the animals are only occasionally or rarely seen. The exception to this tendency occurs when a coyote loses its natural fear of people, which can result in a particular animal being more regularly visible during the day, or less likely to leave a place that humans frequent, like a yard.

Coyotes are predators, and they are well adapted to hunt for food. They have also evolved to defend territories from other dog-like animals, and these traits sometimes create conflicts with people and pets.

Coyotes occasionally attack pets, including free-ranging housecats and small dogs, especially when these pets are left unsupervised in areas with territorial coyotes. Occasionally, coyotes can threaten large dogs or people during the mating season (from January through March) and breeding season (April through May). Sometimes people unintentionally approach a den with pups, and the parents will defend the den with growls and barks.

In the Midwest, no serious attacks on people have been documented. In the southwestern United States, some attacks have occurred – usually involving children and often in the wake of increasingly bold behavior from the animal. Supplying coyotes with food – either on purpose or accidentally – can cause animals to become more aggressive.

### Coyote Management Strategies

Coyotes are incredibly difficult to capture, and when an animal is removed from an area another coyote may quickly appear to occupy the available territory. In most situations, prevention is the most effective strategy to minimize coyote/human conflict.

Preventive strategies include:

- Prohibiting the feeding of coyotes or other wildlife
- Supervising pets and children if coyotes are regularly spotted in the area
- Making loud noises or producing other deterrents when coyotes are spotted in or near yards

Coyotes should be removed by professionals if they are repeatedly spotted during the day in yards, if they act aggressively toward pets, or if they follow children. Removal should target the problem animal only instead of all animals in a region, since general removal of the entire coyote population in an area is rarely successful.

If you encounter aggressive or threatening coyotes in Cook County, contact us for assistance!

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