

The Nature of Teller

Coyotes

Physical Description

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are members of the canine family. Of the 19 subspecies, the mountain coyote is the one you'll encounter in Teller County. They have gray, white, tan, and brown fur. The coyote in the photograph was taken from Edlowe Road.



They are about the size of a medium-size dog, weighing 20 to 50 pounds. Their long, bushy tails are helpful species identifiers. Coyotes run with their tails down while domestic dogs run with tails up and wolves run with tails straight out.

Life History

In many areas, coyotes are solitary outside of the breeding season; but their social organization is influenced by prey size. In populations where the majority of prey are small rodents, coyotes tend to be solitary. In populations where larger animals are available (elk and deer), large groups of coyotes (packs) may form. Like other canines, coyotes do not hibernate.

A male and female will pair off and remain together for several years, although they may not be life mates. Mating occurs between January and March. They establish dens abandoned by other animals, or dig one themselves. Litters of 5-7 are born sightless and hairless two months after mating. Their eyes open after 10 days, and they leave the den between 8-10 weeks of age. Movement of pups from one den to another is common. The reason is unknown, but disturbance and infestation by parasites may be factors.

Coyotes in captivity may live as long as 18 years, but in wild populations few coyotes live more than 6 to 8 years.

Coyotes can also mate with dogs. The offspring are called "coydogs," which don't have large populations because they tend to mate during the winter, making it harder for the pups to survive.

Activity and movements

Coyotes are active day and night, with peaks at sunrise or sunset. Generally, activity and movements, such as foraging, are greatest at night.

Coyotes are very vocal in the evening and early morning hours, making a variety of sounds that include barks, growls, yips, whines, and howls. When a coyote howls, it lets other pack members know where it is. Other vocalizations are used for greetings, contacts or sounding alarms. The coyote howl is one of the most iconic wilderness sounds.

Home range and territory

A single home range may be inhabited by a family of two or more generations, a mated pair, or a single adult. Home ranges vary from 2 to 55 square miles depending on food availability. Males tend to have larger home ranges than females. Home ranges of males overlap considerably, but those of females do not. Typically, only pack members defend territories; pairs of coyotes and solitary individuals do not. Coyotes have adapted to living in cities as we develop more of their habitat.

Food Habits

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and eat a variety of food including small mammals, domestic pets, livestock, and domestic fowl. About 90 percent of their diet consists of animal matter; however, they also eat vegetable matter. During winter, much of the diet is made up of rabbits, and the carrion of large ungulates. Small mammals, especially voles and mice, are important food items during spring, summer, and fall.

Control and Management

In Colorado, coyotes are classified as a game species and may be taken year-round with either a small game or a furbearer license. Landowners may kill coyotes, without a license, on their land if the coyotes threaten their property or livestock.

Using sound or visual stimuli to keep coyotes away from livestock or other resources will only provide temporary effectiveness, if any. Certain breeds of guard dogs, as well as llamas and donkeys, may effectively exclude coyotes from pastures. Guard animals are most effective when they are behaviorally bonded to the sheep or goats they are protecting.

Humans can coexist with coyotes. The following guidelines can help you and your family to be “Coyote Wise”

If a Coyote Approaches You:

- Do not run or turn your back
- Be as big and loud as possible
- Wave your arms and throw objects
- Face the coyote and back away slowly
- If attacked, fight back

Protect Your Pets:

- Keep pets on a short leash
- Use extra caution dusk through dawn
- Avoid known or potential den sites and thick vegetation
- Do not allow dogs to interact with coyotes
- Pick up small pets if confronted by a coyote
- Don't leave pet food outside
- If you must leave your pet outside, secure it in a fully enclosed kennel

Resources: Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Live Science, US Forest Service Index of Species Information

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