

LIVING WITH COYOTES IN DUPAGE COUNTY



Natural History

Not many residents of DuPage County have heard the howl of a coyote at night. But a growing number of sightings point to the presence of this North American wild dog within the county and its forest preserves. Seeing a coyote, however, is by no means a routine occurrence. Like most wild animals, they keep their distance from people and are still considered by Forest Preserve biologists to be uncommon.

The local coyote population appears to be stabilizing after a period of growth over the last two decades. In a time when most carnivorous animals are retreating in the face of dwindling open spaces, the coyote has been gradually extending its range into the northeastern U.S., moving into areas with preserves or other open country. Coyotes have been sighted at 25 forest preserves and other locations within DuPage, with sightings most common in the western forest preserves.

Characteristics

With a gray or reddish-gray color and adult weight between 20 and 45 pounds, the coyote resembles a wolf or husky, although it is markedly smaller. The footprints and droppings are also somewhat similar to those of domestic dogs. The greenish-gold glitter of the coyote's eyes and its distinctive howling are probably responsible for its legendary status in the folklore of the "Wild West."

Open or brushy country, rather than deep woods, is the preferred home for the coyote. Home ranges vary considerably in size, depending on such factors as type of terrain and availability of food.

Coyotes have been clocked at running speeds of up to 40 mph when chasing a rabbit or other prey. True scavengers, they eat a wide variety of animals and plants, including small rodents, rabbits and berries.

Offspring

The coyote den or home is often located under the roots of an old tree, in the slopes of a hill or among

rocks. Both parents, paired for life, are active in raising the young, which are born in litters than average six pups.

Coyotes are well known for their group behavior, which centers around the family unit made up of the paired male and female, their newborn pups and possibly offspring from the previous year.

Howling

Howling together is an important social activity for the coyote. These prolonged musical cries can carry for miles. Usually one animal begins and the others join in.

Theories about the reasons for this unique form of communication include establishing a territory and keeping family members together.

Howling usually begins at dawn or dusk and may precede the coyote's nightly hunting expedition. Two or three coyotes may gather each night to "sing." Howling is not the only sound within the coyote's repertoire. Coyotes have been heard making barking sounds in a series of high or low-pitched yaps.

Dangers

While it is prudent to be wary of any wild animal, coyotes shy away from human beings and do not present a real threat to preserve users. Unrestrained pets occasionally are attacked by coyotes, providing a good reason for always keeping your pet on a leash while in a forest preserve.

Injured Or Orphaned Animals

Injured or orphaned coyotes should only be approached by qualified personnel such as an animal control agent. Anyone who sees an injured or orphaned coyote in a DuPage forest preserve should contact the District's [Willowbrook Wildlife Center](#) at **(630) 942-6200** and ask to speak to the Wildlife Specialist.