Coyote FAQs

Coyotes are a vital part of LA’s ecosystem, and our landscape and communities benefit from the coyote’s ecosystem services. Coyotes control the populations of animals that may otherwise become pests, such as rodents. By keeping smaller predator populations in check, they also help maintain healthy populations of songbirds, which in turn can reduce mosquito numbers. At the same time, coyotes can be vilified for their potential to predate on pets. This can lead to unwarranted fear and the spread of misinformation throughout communities or on social media. The following are answers to some frequently asked questions about coyotes.

Are coyotes a danger to people?

There are only two confirmed fatal coyote attacks that have occurred on record. The chance of a person being killed by a coyote is virtually zero.

What about non-fatal attacks? In 2015, there were 13 coyote bites reported in LA. Compare this to the number of dog attacks in LA County in 2009: 7,623. Of course, we interact more often, and more intimately with dogs, but given that hundreds of thousands of residents live or work within close proximity to coyotes every day, the chances of being attacked by a coyote are unlikely.

Are there more coyotes in my neighborhood than there used to be?

Why does there seem to be a trend of increased coyote sightings? One possibility is that with camera phones and social media, we are reading about sightings in our neighborhood more frequently. But an underlying cause is habitat loss. As natural habitat is encroached upon and urbanized, the coyotes simply have fewer places where they can go. Urbanization also leads to an increase in garbage, which is either tasty to a coyote, or attracts tasty scavengers such as rodents. This is one factor that leads to the coyotes that end up in urbanized areas becoming habituated to those areas. The coyote look around the neighborhood in which she finds herself and says, "This place is great!"

What causes coyotes to become habituated to urbanized areas?

Coyote habituation is often the result of human behavior, such as providing food for coyotes. Pet food should never be left outside, as this not only attracts coyotes directly, but also attracts feral cats, which become an additional attractor for coyotes. Other food sources include garbage, fallen fruit, or outdoor pets. Unclean conditions can attract rats, which can eventually attract coyotes as well.

In some cases, habituation is the result of coyotes being fed directly. Providing food to a coyote is not just a bad idea, it’s illegal in LA City and County.

Why won’t officials remove coyotes from my neighborhood?

The loss of a pet to a coyote can change the way we feel about our wild neighbors. Many people become frustrated when they call city or state services, only to find that they don’t seem to take much action against the coyote. But there is a good reason these officials won’t relocate or kill the offending coyotes: Such actions don’t help, and may make matters worse.

Coyote family groups consist of an alpha male and female, their pups, and some non-breeding “helpers.” The alphas control their turf, making sure opportunistic outsiders don’t try to set up shop within their territory. If the alpha male is removed, a power vacuum is created in that territory. Outsiders come in and begin mating with the females. If multiple coyotes have been killed, this temporary lapse in competition results in more successful rearing of pups, possibly leading to an increase in the local coyote population. Because the underlying causes of the coyote’s undesirable behavior have not been addressed, this new generation continues to commit the coyote crimes of its predecessors.

How can I protect my pets and keep coyotes out of my yard?

Our best course of action is to coexist with coyotes, and this means breaking the chain of habituation. Never feed coyotes. This also means not leaving food or water for pets outside, securing garbage bins, and cleaning up fallen fruit. Taking steps to protect pets keeps them safe and helps prevent coyote habituation. Cats should stay indoors, or have access to a “catio,” an enclosed outdoor area where they won’t be exposed to outside dangers. Dogs shouldn’t be left outside unsupervised, and should be walked on a 6 ft. leash. Walking in groups can help deter coyotes, as can switching up walking routes so coyotes do not learn the daily routine. If a coyote is spotted, pick up small pets and children immediately. Coyotes can easily scale most fences. “Coyote rollers” can keep them from doing so. These rolling tubes are installed atop fences so coyotes can’t get a grip and climb over.

What is coyote hazing?

Coyotes seem to be gradually forgetting that humans are scary creatures to be avoided. This can be retaught by “hazing” coyotes. If you come across a coyote, make yourself big, wave your arms in the air, and make noise. You can yell, or use noisemakers such as an airhorn or can full of bolts. If you are comfortable, walk towards the coyote, but do not corner it. If necessary, throw rocks around the coyote. Continue until the coyote retreats. If you give up hazing prematurely, you have taught the coyote that humans make loud noises but eventually go away. Hazing is a community effort. If only one resident is hazing, the coyote will learn to only avoid that one person.

By making our neighborhoods less attractive as habitat, taking precautions with pets, and teaching coyotes that humans should be avoided, we can reduce conflict and coexist with our wild neighbors.

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