

THE ROLE OF COYOTES IN ECOSYSTEMS

Coyotes have been found to play an integral role in maintaining the health and integrity of a variety of native ecosystems, including chaparral, grasslands, and wetlands. They regulate the numbers of smaller predators, such as foxes, raccoons, skunks and rabbits through a competitive exclusion and direct killing. Studies have shown that the absence of coyotes allows smaller predators to proliferate.

Researchers at Texas Tech University reported that the killing of nearly all of the coyotes in a 5,000-hectare area caused a significant increase in the numbers of jackrabbits, badgers, gray foxes and bobcats, and a severe decline in the diversity of rodent species.

WHY KILLING DOES NOT SOLVE CONFLICTS WITH COYOTES

It is extremely difficult to identify that the problem causing coyote(s) will be the one located and killed. Coyotes removed from an area will quickly be replaced by others. Coyotes pairs hold territories, which leaves single coyotes (“floaters”) constantly looking for new places to call home. If attractants in the neighborhood are not removed new coyotes in an area can quickly become “nuisance” coyotes.

SHELTER

Coyotes are secretive animals, and studies have shown they can live for a long time in close proximity to dense human settlements without ever being noticed.

In the Spring, when coyotes give birth and begin to raise litters, they concentrate their activities around dens or burrows in which the young are sheltered. At these times, they may become highly defensive and territorial, and challenge any other coyote or dog that comes close to the pups. People walking their dogs in parks and wooded areas may run into these situations and even be challenged by parent coyotes to back off. Fights occur rarely and most often when dogs are off leash. It’s important to recognize such incidents for what they are: defense of space, not random attacks.



COYOTES AMONG US



LIVING WITH COYOTES IN LAGUNA NIGUEL

Coyotes are one of the most resilient and adaptable native carnivores in North America and few animals evoke as wide a range of feelings in humans as the coyote. To some, coyotes are part of the American culture, important to the environment, and deserving of respect. To others, they are viewed as dangerous, wild animals who are better off dead than alive. Regardless of one's views, coyotes are here to stay, and with increased urbanization and development, conflict between humans and coyotes will undoubtedly continue.

Coyotes are found throughout Orange County, including Laguna Niguel, and interactions between humans and coyotes have become more commonplace in expanding cities and suburbs. The vast majority of these encounters are sightings. Most people are unaware that there are coyotes in their midst, as coyotes generally keep a low profile and avoid humans. Coyotes may, however, prey on cats and small dogs.

KEEPING COYOTES AT A DISTANCE

The coyote is drawn to urban and suburban neighborhoods for two reasons: human encroachment into the coyotes' habitat and the availability of food and water.

The following guidelines may help prevent coyotes and other wildlife from being attracted to your home:

- Keep trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids. Only place the cans curbside the morning of collection.

- Fence off animal enclosures (fully enclose if possible).
- Keep cats and small dogs indoors or in the close presence of an adult.
- Keep yards free from potential shelter such as overgrown shrubs, brush and weeds.
- Motion-activated sprinkler systems can help keep coyotes and other unwanted wildlife out of gardens.



- Eliminate food and water sources, such as fallen fruit, standing water.
- Feed pets indoors-do not leave pet food outside.
- DO NOT feed coyotes or any wildlife.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. Aggressive behavior

toward people is unusual and is most often a result of habituation (loss of fear of humans) due to feeding by humans. If you encounter a coyote, remember the following:

- Never feed a coyote.
- Never attempt to "tame" a Coyote.
- Do not turn your back or run from a coyote.
- Attempt to leave the area calmly.
- If you feel threatened, make loud noises and make yourself look big by raising your hands above your head.
- If this fails, throw a rock or stick at the coyote toward their body but never at the head.
- Always keep yourself between a coyote and small children or companion animals.
- If walking on trails frequented by coyotes, carry a deterrent such as an air horn, whistle, walking stick, cane, pepper spray or squirt guns.
- Coyotes are generally skittish by nature and as a rule, do not act aggressively towards people. However, engaging animals that are sick or injured can result in unpredictable behavior. If you suspect that a coyote is sick or injured, DO NOT interact with the coyote. Call Mission Viejo Animal Services immediately at (949) 470-3045.