- Never deliberately feed a coyote or other wild mammal.
- Securely cover garbage cans and compost bins.
- Remove fallen fruit from yards.
- Eliminate opportunities for rats to breed in and around your yard.
- Never deliberately approach a coyote, and teach children to respect all wildlife from a distance.
- Keep house pets indoors and allow only controlled access to the outdoors (fenced yards and leashes). Always keep pets inside from dusk to dawn, when coyotes are most active.
- To prevent coyotes from entering your yard, consider removing unnecessary brush, installing a motion-sensitive lighting system, or installing a coyote-proof fence. To be effective, fences must be at least six feet tall, have no openings greater than four inches, and should extend flush with the ground.
- If you do not want coyotes around your home, let them know that they are not welcome. If you see a coyote, shout and make noise, wave your arms.

**Audubon Society of Portland
Wildlife Care Center**
5151 NW Cornell Road
Portland, OR 97210
Phone: 503-292-0304
9 am-5 pm - 7 days a week 365 days a year

AdministrationOffices
Phone: 503-292-6855
Fax: 503-292-1021
Hours: 9 am to 5 pm, Mon-Fri

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Photo: Jim Cruce

Urban Coyotes

Living with Urban Coyotes

Natural History

Coyotes (Canis latrans) are members of the dog family. Canis latrans means "barking dog." This highly adaptive species was originally considered native only to the western two thirds of the United States, but landscape alterations and the elimination of large predators have allowed it to expand its range throughout North America. Until the 1940s, coyotes in Oregon were considered somewhat rare west of the Cascades.

Thick, dense fur can sometimes make coyotes appear larger than they really are. In Oregon, coyotes typically weigh between 22 and 30 pounds. Their primary diet is made up of small rodents, but coyotes are opportunistic and will consume a vast array of foods including birds and insects, fruit and vegetables, human garbage and compost, outdoor pet food and small, free-roaming pets.

Coyotes are monogamous and can be found as lone individuals, pairs, or members of packs similar to wolves. Typically, only the dominant pair breeds and produces one litter per year. Breeding occurs between January and March, with a gestation period of 62 days. Litters range from 4-7 pups and young will remain with the parents until late summer, learning how to hunt. Coyotes are at home in a variety of habitat types and will den in burrows, under downed trees, in thick brambles, and culverts.

While coyotes are most active between dusk and dawn, they can be seen at any time of the day. Generally shy and wary of humans, they can also be quite curious and will often observe human activity from what they perceive to be a safe distance. They will protect active dens from predators, including other coyotes and dogs.

Despite widespread efforts to reduce coyote populations, coyotes have managed to survive and thrive in and among human populations. Sightings in and around Portland began in the 1980s and have in-

Photo: Jim Cruce

creased over the past 15 years. While most frequently sighted near natural areas, coyotes have also been seen deep into the urban interior. By providing accessible garbage cans, compost bins, outdoor pet bowls, and free-roaming pets, humans have inadvertently promoted urban coyote populations. Coyotes typically do not present risks to humans and with a few behavior modifications we can learn to coexist and appreciate the animal that Navajo sheep and goat herders referred to as "God's dog."

Coyotes and Humans

Unless habituated to humans, coyotes are generally shy and wary and present a minimal risk to humans. There has been only one human death attributed to coyote predation in the United States. This occurred in California in the 1970s when a coyote that had been deliberately habituated to human handouts preyed upon his human feeder's three-year-old child. In Oregon, the only documented "attack" on a human was a provoked situation in which a man was bitten while attempting to beat a cornered coyote to death with a 2x4. Those incidents that have occurred nationwide most often fall into the category of nips, bites, and scratches rather than predatory attacks and almost always follow situations in which the coyote has been deliberately habituated to human handouts.

Photo: Jim Cruce

Coyotes and Pets

Coyotes are opportunistic and will prey upon free-roaming cats and small dogs. The best prevention is to keep pets under control either indoors, on a leash, or within a fenced yard. Regardless of whether coyotes are present or not, the average lifespan of an outdoor cat is less than two years. Outdoor cats face potential death from cars, disease, parasites, abuse, and dogs, in addition to coyotes. The only way to truly protect pets is to keep them contained or under direct control whenever they are outdoors.

Realities of Coyote Control

It is illegal to relocate a coyote in the State of Oregon. It is also illegal to hold a coyote in a captive situation in the State of Oregon. The only alternative for coyotes that need to be removed from a specific location is euthanasia.

Coyotes are notoriously difficult to "live trap." There are three common methods for eliminating coyotes in urban and suburban environments: leg hold traps, neck snares, and sodium cyanide devices. None of these devices is selective in what it captures and all present real risks to pets and non-target wildlife.

While coyote control can be effective in eliminating specific individuals, it will not help reduce local populations. Coyotes have a compensatory, density-dependant breeding rate. Killing coyotes disrupts population structure, causing more coyotes to breed and have larger litters. Coyotes will also quickly fill into vacated habitat from adjacent areas. For these reasons, eradication efforts frequently lead to increases in local coyote populations.