

The Eastern coyote flourishes in cities throughout Ontario, they are important for rodent control and a natural part of our urban ecosystems and even though you may never encounter a coyote it is important to be aware of their existence and understand coyote behaviour to coexist safely.

Eastern Coyote or Coywolf?

Coywolf or brush wolf are names sometimes used to describe the Eastern coyote. These terms can be misleading as the Eastern coyote is not a wolf or a new species, although a hybrid of western coyote and eastern wolf, the same animal has existed in Ontario for more than 100 years and they possess all the characteristics and behaviours of a coyote.

How Big Are They?

The Eastern coyote has long legs and a bushy coat which makes them appear much larger than they actually are. People often describe them as the size of a large German shepherd, in reality, the average weight of a coyote ranges from 13kg (30lbs) to 18kg (40lbs).

When Are They Active?

Coyotes are active both day and night, although they often hunt during the low light hours between dusk and dawn as they are less likely to encounter a human.

Do They Live in Packs?

Coyote families consist of a mated pair and their young. Adults will mate for life and the pups disperse in the fall or following spring. Family units are seen during summer, fall and winter. Occasionally a yearling may stay with the parents but does not breed; they will share in the duties of raising the pups. Coyotes are territorial and do not abide new coyotes in their territory so they do not usually increase in number unless there is an abundance of food to support additional families or family members.

What Do They Eat?

Like humans, coyotes are omnivores. Their natural diet consists of small mammals such as mice and rabbits. Coyotes are opportunists and will visit residential properties in search of bird feeders, pet food, vegetable gardens, fruit and nut trees, compost or garbage.

Are They Dangerous to Humans?

Coyotes are shy and tend to avoid humans. Coyotes are also intelligent and curious and will observe or follow humans at a distance, a behaviour known as “shadowing”. This behaviour is often mistaken for “bold or aggressive” when it is actually curiosity or a polite way of escorting you out of the territory, particularly if you are walking a dog. *If a coyote is approaching or aggressive to humans, this is not normal behaviour, report the incident immediately.*

Are they Dangerous to Pets?

Coyotes are part of the canine family and when they encounter a dog, particularly if the dog is off leash, barking, chasing or near a den site this may trigger the coyote’s natural instinct to either flee or defend itself, its territory or its pups. Pets are not a natural part of a coyote’s diet but pets can be at risk if they are outdoors and unsupervised or off leash. The best way to protect your pet is to supervise them in your yard until they are safely inside, always walk your dog on a short leash and keep cats indoors.

Why Can’t the City Remove Them?

Coyotes are extremely intelligent and difficult to trap without the use of leg hold traps or snares. These devices would have to be placed in natural areas and green spaces putting people and pets at risk of being injured. Once a coyote is caught provincial law says that it cannot be relocated beyond home territory and subsequently it would have to be released nearby or destroyed. More importantly the removal of one coyote only provides a vacancy for another coyote to fill, a fact that has been proven historically through decades of culling.

Where do Coyotes Live?

Coyotes establish territories and they hunt and live within them. Urban territories can be as small as two square kilometres or as large as 14 square kms. *Coyotes travel through residential areas, even if you don't see them.*

Denning Season

Coyotes den during the early spring months and this is when they may become more alert and stressed when humans or dogs are nearby. Later they abandon the den and raise the pups in a nursery location until the pups are old enough to hunt with the parents and eventually disperse as yearlings. *If a coyote is agitated or vocalizing back away slowly and leave the area, there may be a den or pups nearby.*

Common Locations for Coyotes

Coyotes use hydro and highway corridors, rail lines, creeks, river ravines, park trails and long stretches of green space to travel discreetly through the city. Other locations such as golf courses, storm water ponds, even commercial properties can provide habitat, prey and privacy. *Be prepared to encounter wildlife any time but particularly near these areas. Keep dogs on a short leash and away from dense vegetation.*

What Should I Do When I See a Coyote In A Park or Near a School?

Parks and school yards are green spaces and often vacant for long periods of time, coyotes are not aware these areas are "off limits". *Report the sighting and any food attractions.*

What if I See a Coyote in My Yard?

Coyotes do not understand the concept of private property and during the winter months when food is scarce and outdoor human activity is limited, they may search around homes for rodents and rabbits which are often attracted by edible shrubbery and bird feeders. *Remove all food attractions. Scare the coyote by banging pots and pans, coyotes learn to avoid areas through negative experiences. Fences are a deterrent, not a guarantee.*

What if Someone is Feeding Wildlife? Is it Against the Law?

Residents are cautioned never to feed coyotes, the number one cause of nuisance or bold coyote behaviour has been linked to feeding. City of Mississauga Animal Care and Control By-law 0098-04, prohibits the feeding of wildlife. *Report wildlife feeding.*

TIPS TO COEXIST WITH COYOTES

Remove all food attractions, do not feed coyotes or wildlife, keep shrubs trimmed

Supervise your pet until it is safely inside your home, walk your dog on short leash and keep cats indoors

Never leave young children alone, teach them not to approach animals and to let you know if they see an animal

Be alert if you walk your dog during low light hours and/or near natural areas, particularly during denning months

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE

- Pick up small dogs – keep large dogs leashed and back away
- Stay calm and wait until they move away, do not turn your back, do not run
- If approached, stand tall, wave your arms, make yourself as large as possible
- Clap, yell, shout loudly, throw something or make startling movements
- Carry a flashlight, audible alarm or an umbrella you can open to startle them or use as a barrier

To Report Unusual Wildlife Activity or the Feeding of Wildlife

Contact Animal Services at:

905-896-5858 or after hours 905-615-3000

In the Case of Immediate Threat to Personal Safety Call - 911

This information has been provided by the City of Mississauga Animal Services.
For additional wildlife information visit our web site at www.mypetmississauga.ca

