

COYOTES ARE RELATIVELY new to Kentucky, but they're already well established. Reports of coyote sightings and predation on livestock and pets have expanded from rural farms to several cities, including Louisville and Frankfort. Observations of coyotes traveling through neighborhoods, complaints of coyotes lingering near homes, and predation of cats and small dogs are increasingly common in some places.

Coyotes aren't just visitors to Kentucky's cities. Last year, a coyote gained national media attention when it took a stroll through Central Park in New York City. Recently, a coyote walked into a sandwich shop in

Dealing with problem coyotes

By Laura Patton

What happened to my cat?

Chicago, where it proceeded to rest in a beverage cooler. In southwestern cities, such as Los Angeles, coyotes have become used to humans.

While coyotes once were restricted to the prairies of the central United States, land clearing and the loss of wolves allowed coyotes to expand their range throughout the continent. The coyote's opportunistic nature allows it to adapt to almost any habitat. Coyotes can live nearly anywhere and eat almost anything. Although coyotes mainly eat rodents, they also eat a variety of other foods ranging from grasshoppers to fruit to deer fawns.

The coyote's exceptional adaptability often causes problems with humans, and the mere sight of these animals can cause alarm. Because the coyote didn't colonize Kentucky until recently, many people are not accustomed to seeing the animals, especially in cities.

Coyote sightings usually increase in the spring, when adult coyotes are searching for food for their pups, and again in fall, when young coyotes are establishing their territories. Coyotes are wild animals and can be dangerous, especially if fed by humans. Although coyote attacks on humans are not common, they have occurred, and often are

associated with humans giving them food.

What solutions are available for dealing with coyote problems? Most people want to know how to eliminate all the coyotes in their neighborhood or around their farm. It's not possible. Because of their resiliency, coyotes respond differently to population control efforts than other wildlife. Females will start breeding at a younger age and produce larger litters. Pup survival can increase. This compensates for the population reduction and can even cause an increase in the number of coyotes in an area.

A better strategy is to eliminate just the problem animals.

Trapping with foothold traps or snares is the most effective and least time-consuming method for getting rid of coyotes preying on livestock. Trapped coyotes should be killed, because moving them elsewhere just creates

a problem for another farmer. Landowners do not need a hunting or trapping license to kill problem coyotes, but they should contact a conservation officer prior to trapping. Kentucky has a year-round hunting season for coyotes with no bag limit.

Coyote hunting is a growing sport, and farmers might consider inviting a coyote hunter onto their land to shoot a problem animal in exchange for the hunting opportunity. Farmers can also invite fur trappers to trap on their land during the furbearer trapping season, which runs from mid-November through February. Fur trappers welcome new opportunities and will often take several kinds of nuisance wildlife, including raccoons, foxes, skunks, beavers and otters.

Not all coyotes kill livestock. If you see coyotes on your farm and they are not causing problems, it may better serve you to leave them alone. Farmers can reduce coyote





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activity within pastures by putting fencing on gates and reinforcing existing fencing to obstruct regularly traveled trails beneath fences. Bury livestock carcasses to keep from attracting coyotes to the area.

Coyotes occasionally show up around houses and can cause conflicts. If coyotes become a problem around your home, keep potential food sources such as pet food and garbage inside. It's also a good idea to keep small pets inside as well. If food is readily available, a coyote will have a hard time ignoring an easy meal. Wild animals spend as little energy as possible in obtaining food. This allows them to save more energy for the breeding season. The less effort a female spends on obtaining food, the more fat she is able to store, which may increase her chances of having larger litters and healthier pups.

A bowl of pet food left on the back porch or a small dog chained in a backyard is

Coyotes are not just creatures of the woods. They can be attracted to suburban neighborhoods by pet food left outdoors.

an easy meal for a coyote. If food is abundant in a neighborhood, the number of coyotes could increase. Removing food sources will force coyotes to look elsewhere for something to eat.

Eliminating food sources will not work if your neighbors are not doing the same. Deterring coyotes is a community effort. By encouraging your neighbors not to feed coyotes – either intentionally or unintentionally – you will also deter other nuisance wildlife including raccoons, skunks and in eastern Kentucky, black bears.

What should you do if a coyote seems aggressive? If a coyote approaches too close for comfort, stand your ground and scare the animal away. Do not run, because this sparks their instinctive nature to chase. Make loud

noises such as shouting and clapping your hands. Wave your arms and throw things at the animal. This helps maintain the coyote's natural fear of humans. Do not run into your house and hide behind a closed door, as this will likely encourage coyotes to come closer and be more aggressive.

If you hunt or fish and come across a coyote in the woods that seems aggressive, it likely has food cached nearby, or pups in a den it is protecting. It is best to move slowly away from the area.

To avoid conflicts with coyotes, people in both rural and urban areas should responsibly manage the area surrounding their homes. Residents should keep food sources indoors, especially during peak times of coyote activity. Managing coyote conflicts takes the efforts of an entire community.

For more information about trapping coyotes, call the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources at 1-800-858-1549. ■