



## Coyotes – Part of the Ecosystem

Like many states across the West, Nevada has seen residential and commercial development reach into wild lands. As it has elsewhere, that development has had a direct impact on numerous wildlife species and their habitats. Ironically, while some species suffer from the impacts of urban development, the wily coyote thrives.

From their original haunts, which extended from parts of north-central Mexico to southwestern Canada, coyotes have extended their range to nearly all of North America. Their range even includes urban centers like Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas.

Wildlife officials at the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) are educating the public about ways to assist homeowners in reducing and limiting impacts from these animals.

“The amazing thing about coyotes is their ability to adapt and adjust to changes in their natural environment and to the challenges of living in an urban environment. They can sometimes be seen roaming areas on the

outskirts of cities and towns and even venturing into urban areas,” said Kevin Lansford, predator biologist for NDOW.

Popular drawing cards for Nevada homebuyers are golf courses, lush water-based landscape design and life on the edge of natural surroundings. What homebuyers often fail to realize is that these qualities are just as attractive to a variety of wildlife, coyotes and other predators that are already living in the areas bordering new developments.

“Oftentimes people buy homes on the desert’s edge so they can have a more natural experience, but they want to pick and choose what critters come to visit. It just doesn’t work that way,” said Lansford. “Golf courses, landscaping with water features, and washes or other avenues that provide animals with direct access to and from open desert areas attract prey species such as squirrels, rabbits and birds. These species then become an attractant for coyotes and other predators looking for a meal.”

Though coyotes have been known to hunt and eat domestic pets, simply seeing one is not necessarily cause for alarm, nor is it necessary to call NDOW. However, a call may be warranted any time a coyote is showing threatening behavior towards people, especially children. The key to preventing possible conflicts with coyotes or other wildlife, according to NDOW, is to reduce or eliminate those attractants such as pet food, garbage or areas where small game will hide.

***Under no circumstance should you feed a coyote or any other wild animal.***

## How to Avoid Problems

With just a few common sense precautions, coyote/human negative encounters can be greatly reduced or eliminated.

- First, do not feed coyotes or any other wild animal. Providing food makes them dependent and they can lose their natural fear of humans. People who provide them with food run the risk of being bitten and increase the chance of their neighbors having a coyote issue. It is also positive reinforcement where the animal is rewarded for being in close contact with humans.

- Do not corner the animal, such as in a garage. Give it plenty of opportunity to escape. Do not let your pets harass them; they are very capable fighters. If a fight between your pet and a coyote starts, do not use your own hands or feet to separate them. Try to use a weapon such as a walking stick to break up the fight. Many reported bites are just as apt to be from the dog itself as the coyote. If you are ever bitten by a coyote, immediately report the incident to local health officials. If the offending animal cannot be captured and tested for disease, seek professional medical advice.

- Keep pet food out of the coyote’s reach and secure garbage cans. Coyotes are opportunistic and will make a meal of pet food or table scraps that are left in unsecured containers. If a dog or cat is fed outside, bring uneaten food inside as soon as the pet has finished eating. Place trash in a secure container so that it is unavailable to coyotes.

- Abide by leash laws and avoid letting dogs and cats roam freely. Coyotes kill and eat small dogs and house cats.

- Work with your neighbors to make your neighborhood undesirable to coyotes. If coyotes are frequenting your neighborhood,

you can be certain that they are being fed or are finding food. Work with your neighbors to eliminate food sources that are bringing the animals into the neighborhood.

- Be supportive of animal control and wildlife agencies that are working to manage coyotes and other wildlife and domestic animals.

- House small livestock in pens or coops.
- Frightening devices such as motion sensitive bright lights and noise makers have limited effectiveness.

- Exclusions, other than chain link fencing buried a foot underground and at least 5 feet above ground, are difficult and expensive due to the coyote’s abilities to jump and dig.

- Problem individuals can be trapped for removal by government agencies or private pest control companies if an animal has been killed or damage has occurred.

- Modify habitat to reduce and eliminate hiding areas for prey. Habitat modifications are the best method of reducing or eliminating the prey base and their food sources. Remove brush to help eliminate hiding places for both predator and prey. Junk piles or wood and slash piles are excellent cover for not only the predators but sometimes the prey they seek such as rabbits, rodents and squirrels.



### COYOTE TRACKS

Broad prints with four toes on all feet.  
The claw marks are usually visible.

# Coyote Facts

## SCIENTIFIC NAME:

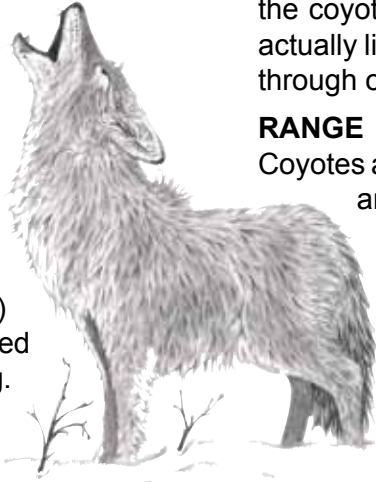
*Canis latrans*

## CLASSIFICATION

unprotected

## DESCRIPTION

The coyote is a member of the dog family (Canidae) and resembles a medium-sized shepherd-collie type dog. Distinguishing characteristics include sharp pointed ears, a pointed nose, and a long bushy tail. The legs of a coyote are generally slimmer and the feet smaller than those of a dog of comparable size. The coat is predominantly gray, changing to tan along the belly, legs, muzzle and ears. Some guard hairs, as well as the tail, are tipped with black.



## SIZE

Coyotes average 24 inches tall at the shoulder and, including the tail, are approximately four feet in length. Coyotes in the desert average about 20 pounds, while those found in mountainous areas average twice that. Females are slightly smaller than males.

## LIFE SPAN

Five to seven years in the wild.

## HABITAT

From the low desert valleys to the alpine ridges, coyotes are found in about any type of habitat where they can find food and a place to hide. They seem to show some preference for brush-covered rolling hills and flats.

Today coyotes can be found living in green belts in cities across North America, including cities in Nevada. Many large cities in the West such as Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas have coyotes as permanent residents. Often,

the coyote that is seen in an urban area may actually live there, and may not just be passing through on its way to or from an outlying area.

## RANGE

Coyotes are found in all continental U.S. States and Alaska. They flourish throughout the entire state of Nevada including urban areas such as Las Vegas and Reno.

## NATURAL HISTORY

The coyote is deeply rooted in the history and lore of the American west. Prior to the arrival of European people in North America, coyotes were found only in the central part of the U.S. and in northern Mexico. With the elimination of wolves from much of North America, the coyote's range expanded greatly. Wolves fiercely defend their territories and will kill encroaching coyotes. Likewise, coyotes protect their territories by killing foxes.

Coyotes can run at speeds of 25 to 30 miles per hour up to a sprinting burst of 40 miles per hour. They can travel well over 100 miles in a single night.

## FOOD HABITS

The coyote is an opportunistic feeder. In most areas of Nevada, rabbits, rodents and carrion make up the bulk of the coyote diet. Deer and antelope fawns are also taken. In other areas, the coyote diet includes insects and may include up to 40 percent plant material, such as flowers, grass, fruits and seeds. In some areas they prey on domestic sheep, cattle and poultry. Coyotes in urban areas forage at landfills, raid garbage cans and have been known to kill domestic dogs and cats.

## BREEDING

Breeding takes place from January to March and just before the pups are born, one or more

dens are prepared for the litter. An annual litter of three to nine (average of six) pups are born from March to May. A mated pair typically stays together after the pups are born and both male and female share parental duties. This is a prime feeding time when increased predation occurs. Households with domestic pets should keep cats and dogs indoors when yipping of pups occurs. A male and female may stay together for several breeding seasons, but don't necessarily mate for life. Coyote pups have a very low survival rate in their first year. One study shows that only five to 20 percent of pups live to be one year old.

## STATUS

There is a healthy population of coyotes statewide. Though many efforts have been made to reduce, and even to eradicate it, the resilient coyote is as plentiful today as it ever has been. In Nevada coyotes are classified as "unprotected," meaning they are not protected by state law or regulation. While a hunting license or permit is not required to hunt coyotes, every person who takes a coyote by trapping, or sells raw furs for profit shall procure a trapping license.

## REASON FOR STATUS

The ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions and its opportunistic nature have allowed the coyote to continually increase its numbers and expand its range.

## MANAGEMENT & CONSERVATION

Most coyote management is limited to removal of chronic problem animals that are impacting domestic livestock or wildlife. In the past, some efforts have been made to eradicate coyotes from local areas but these efforts have proven mostly unsuccessful. Current management focuses on problem individuals or reducing densities, while educating the public about how to reduce or limit impacts of coyotes.

# Coyotes in Nevada



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