PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

Coyote diseases or parasites are rarely a risk to humans, but could be a risk to domestic dogs in Washington. Anyone handling a coyote should wear rubber gloves, and wash their hands well when finished. Have your dogs vaccinated and checked regularly for parasites.

It is natural for humans to fear what we do not understand. But too often when it comes to wildlife many people react by killing, poisoning, calling for laws to eradicate a species or trap and relocate an animal before first learning about the critter they have encountered. One such animal is the coyote. In Washington, these intelligent and adaptable animals now manage to occupy almost every conceivable habitat type, from open ranch country to densely forested areas to downtown waterfront. They are very beneficial in that they help keep rabbits, deer and raccoons populations balanced.

Coyote attacks on people are extremely rare. There have been a small number of attacks on people in the U.S. and Canada. For comparison: 3 million children are bitten by dogs every year. Your child is millions of times more likely to get hurt by the family pet than by a coyote. Over 300 people have been killed by domestic dogs in the U.S. between 1979 and the late 1990s. There were no documented coyote attacks on humans in Washington State until April 2006 in Bellevue (King County) after two young children were bitten. From 1988 to 1997 in southern California, 53

coyote attacks on humans-resulting in 21 injuries-- were documented.
A study of those incidents indicated that human behavior contributed to the problem.



Photo: dancingpelican

REDUCING CONFLICTS

Humans increase the likelihood of conflicts with coyotes and other wild animals by deliberately or inadvertently feeding the animals, whether by handouts or by providing access to food sources such as garbage, pet food, or livestock carcasses. When people provide food, coyotes and other wild animals lose their natural fear of humans and become increasingly aggressive. To prevent conflicts with coyotes, use the following management strategies around your property and encourage your neighbors to do the same:

- Don't leave small children unattended
- Don't give wildlife access to garbage, fruit and compost
- Feed dogs and cats indoors Don't feed feral cats
- Keep dogs and cats indoors, especially from dusk to dawn
- Modify the landscape around children's play areas. Shrubs and trees should be pruned several feet above ground level so animals can't hide in them.
- Build a fence. Coyotes don't leap fences in a single bound
- Enclose poultry (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) in a secure outdoor pen and house
- Consider using a guard animal certain breeds of dogs, donkeys, and llamas
- Remove road-killed animals that may attract wildlife

For more information about coyotes visit the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife website at: http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/coyotes.htm

"I ask that we all spread the word to our neighbors, coworkers, relatives and friends – wildlife is not to be feared but to be enjoyed. Help them to understand and learn about the wild animal before they overreact with fear. Let's share this wonderful planet with the wild creatures that we have been blessed with."

Michael Pratt, Director of Wildlife Services West Sound Wildlife Shelter Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 206-780-8508; www.westsoundwildlife.org

West Sound Wildlife Shelter's Mission: providecompassionate rehabilitation services to injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife, assure their safe release, and promote wildlife protection & coexistence through public outreach, education, and involvement.



COEXISTING WITH COYOTES

WHY COEXIST?

Coyotes have adapted to urban lifestyles because city environments support them. The majority of coyotes continue to feed primarily on the millions of mice and rats in our urban areas and are just one part of our diverse ecosystem. Coyotes are a sign of a healthy ecosystem.



Photo: Richard Badger

They keep nuisance wildlife populations at healthy levels.

Eradication programs in North American cities have proven expensive failures. While eradication may remove (kill) individual animals, the coyote habitat remains.

Trapping and poisoning programs are not practical because they do not discriminate between coyotes, children, pets and other wildlife and expose all of them to the same risk.

When Coyotes become aggressive they must be removed. However, if the environment and human behavior that led to the coyote's actions remain problem coyotes will occur again and again. People must stop feeding coyotes and allowing them to feel comfortable around homes, people and pets.

COYOTES AND PETS

Keeping Our Pets Safe

Recognizing the risk is the first step towards preventing conflict between coyotes and your pet. Some coyotes will prey on outdoor cats and small dogs. Pets have been taken from backyards, open spaces and even right off the leash. There are, however, some things you can do to reduce the risk to your pets.

Free roaming outdoor cats also face potential death from cars, diseases, parasites, raccoons and domestic dogs, in addition to coyotes.

- Do not feed your cat/dog outdoors
- Secure garbage cans that will attract coyotes
- Use electronic pet doors (available at PetSmart)
- Ensure your cat's safety by building outdoor cat runs
- Keep your dog on a short leash while outside
- Avoid extension leashes
- Supervise your dog when it is off-leash in the yard
- Walk your dog at times and places that coincide with high pedestrian traffic
- Keep your dog in front of you; if your dog stops, keep an eye on it

Coyotes pose very little risk to medium sized to large dogs. Keep large dogs on leash, except in designated areas, and discourage your dog from feeling comfortable with coyotes by preventing it from "playing" or interacting with a coyote.



Photo: Richard Badger



NPS Photo

COYOTE NATURAL HISTORY Feeding Habits

- Coyotes are opportunists, both as hunters and as scavengers. They eat any small animal they can capture, including mice, rats, gophers, mountain beavers, rabbits, fawns and squirrels, also snakes, lizards, frogs, fish, birds, and carrion (animal carcasses). Grass, fruits, berries, grasshoppers and other insects are also eaten along with garbage, garden crops, livestock, poultry, and pets (mostly cats).
- Coyotes occasionally kill domestic dogs and cats that they consider territorial intruders. Coyotes are also very protective of their young and will attack dogs that get too close to their den and pups.
- Note: The list of killers of domestic cats and dogs includes other dogs and cats, vehicles, bears, cougars, bobcats, foxes, disease, and furious neighbors!
- Most hunting activity takes place at night.
 Undisturbed and hungry coyotes will hunt during daylight hours, and may be seen following farm machinery, catching voles and other small prey.

Reproduction, Den and Family Structure

- The female coyote digs her own den under an uprooted tree, log, or thicket; may use a cave, hollow log, or storm drain; or take over and enlarge another mammal's burrow.
- Coyotes usually have several dens and move from one to the other, minimizing the risk that a den containing young will be detected. These moves also help to prevent an accumulation of fleas and other parasites, as well as urine, droppings, and food refuse.
- Coyotes use the same dens yearly or make new dens in the same area.
- Mated coyotes will live, hunt, and raise pups together for many years, sometimes for life.
- Breeding occurs in late winter. After a gestation (pregnancy) of 63 days, an average of four pups are born from early April to late May.
- The young are principally cared for by the female; occasionally a nonbreeding sibling will assist with raising the litter.
- Pups emerge from the den in two to three weeks and begin to eat regurgitated food. Because food requirements increase dramatically during pup rearing, this is a period when conflicts between humans and coyotes are common.
- Juvenile coyotes usually disperse alone or sometimes in groups at six to eight months of age. A few may stay nearby, while others seek new territory up to 50 miles away. The greater the amount of food available in a given area, the closer the juveniles will stay to their den.
- Coyotes can interbreed with domestic dogs; however, such crosses are rare.
- Few coyotes live more than four years; the majority of pups die during their first year.
- By six months of age, pups have permanent teeth and are nearly fully grown. At about this time, female coyotes train their offspring to search for food, so it is not unusual to observe a family group.
- Never approach an occupied coyote den. A mother's protective instincts can make her dangerous if she has young in or nearby the den.