

Living with Wildlife – Coyotes – Part I



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It is ironic that in the old 'wild' west, cities like Vancouver and Calgary use education and public awareness programs to promote Living with Coyotes while here in the nation's capital, a stone's throw away from parliament hill, we've had the embarrassing spectacle these last few years of coyote killing contests.

In Calgary, due to progressive education programs, coyote deaths have nearly been eliminated, a significant achievement given the city has an estimated coyote population of 400 to 700 individuals. Hopefully, Ottawa will now move toward the trend in cities across North America, like Calgary, that are working towards sensible, science-based solutions for preventing coyote conflicts.

This week we want to tell you more about the animal

while in the following weeks we'll explore the myths surrounding coyotes, how we can prevent conflicts as well as learn to appreciate the coyote's unique contribution as a top predator in the ecosystem.

The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a medium-sized member of the dog family that includes wolves and foxes. Coyotes are usually grayish brown with reddish tinges behind the ears and around the face, but coloration can vary from a silver-gray to black.

The Eastern Coyote that lives in this area is a hybrid between western coyotes and eastern (Algonquin) wolves and weighs on average between 30 to 45 pounds. Although they can breed with domestic dogs, producing "coy-dogs", it is generally rare.

Coyotes are highly social. The majority belong to a pack that is led by an alpha male and female. The alpha pair is monogamous and the average pack size is four to seven individuals.

Photo courtesy of Michael Davies

Although coyotes live in family groups, they usually travel and hunt alone.

They are an extremely intelligent and adaptive species and are thus able to take advantage of a wide range of habitat.

Mating takes place in February with, on average, four to six pups born in April and May. The den is normally a burrow in the soil. Both parents are involved in raising the young, and the dog (male) assumes the responsibility of bringing food to the den for the bitch and the young. The growing pups are very playful, much like domestic pups. Even the adults show affection among themselves and occasionally high spirits, tossing sticks about.

For many of us, the coyote's 'song', a series of yelps, followed by a falsetto howl, is a stirring vestige of one of our last connections to nature. More on coyotes next week. In the meantime, for all your wildlife questions visit www.wildlifeinfo.ca.