

## **WILDLIFE STRATEGY BASED ON COEXISTENCE**

### **LIVING WITH COYOTES**

#### **Coyotes – Part of our Environment**

It's not surprising that coyotes have always been part of the landscape in Ottawa. After all, the majority of our suburban communities were farmers' fields not that long ago, where coyotes kept mice populations under control.

And, even though we have encroached on much of their former territory, given that development has eliminated forests, meadows and farmers' fields, coyotes have adapted to live with us. Coyotes exist in cities throughout North America. A photo of a coyote waiting for a traffic light to change to green late at night in downtown Chicago shows how well they have adapted.

Here in Ottawa, we have lots of natural habitat with a 50,000 acre Greenbelt, hydro and river corridors and many parks. We just have to take the few measures needed to share some of that space with our wild neighbours. The key is to learn more about coyote biology and behaviour and the practical tips for avoiding potential conflicts. Understanding why a species acts in a certain way is crucial to responding in an informed manner.

For example, with home security cameras, people may record a coyote on their property late at night but it shouldn't provoke concern as the coyote is simply following its primary diet – mice. Education is key to having people enjoy nature and wildlife instead of living with paralyzing fear that is unwarranted.

#### **Public Opposition to Killing Coyotes**

As happened in 2010, it was once again the senseless killing of coyotes in the Fall of 2022 in Ottawa that has resulted in the public demand for a progressive Wildlife Strategy.

The City trapped and killed 3 coyotes, residents witnessed a fourth coyote dragging a leg-hold trap for days, while a fifty coyote was found in a horrifically cruel neck snare.

The controversy around these incidents prompted a resident to apply through FOI for city documents. The records received showed misinformation given to the public, an unscientific rationale for killing the three coyotes and a number of distressed calls from residents to 311 reporting the coyote dragging the leg-hold trap.

#### **Challenging the Term 'Habituated'**

All urban/suburban wildlife have had to adapt to living amongst us to survive. The City's labelling a coyote 'habituated' became a convenient excuse for killing coyotes last Fall, rather than putting in place the effective measures being used by progressive cities across North America.

The behaviours the City used below to identify 'habituated' coyotes do not meet even a minimum standard of commonsense as our response indicates:

- a) They accessed composters – all wildlife will take advantage of an available food source.
- b) They 'hunted' (yes, the quotation marks are the City's) domestic pets – how is the coyote to know the difference between a wild rabbit and a free-roaming cat?

- c) They entered the trap easily and quickly – a leg-hold trap baited with food and placed in the animal's natural territory, i.e. the hydro corridor, will attract any animal, including a family dog.

## **Recommendations**

- 1) Discontinue 'sighting' reports, particularly as the City reports do not distinguish the difference between 'sightings' and 'incidents'. Asking people to report a 'sighting' promotes unwarranted fear and the expectation that it's a safety concern that the City should do something about.

For example, in the 79 'sighting/incident' city reports over the course of a month, found in an FOI document, not one represented a threat. Many had been recorded on home security cameras after midnight, others reported seeing a coyote walking down a road toward a natural area.

- 2) Adopt modern terminology/language, omitting subjective terms such as 'habituation'.
- 3) Wildlife-sensitive planning is key to a successful Coyote Strategy. Taking a proactive approach in identifying wildlife habitat and land-use changes (either human planned or weather caused) that are likely to alter human-wildlife interactions, should be the first step.
- 4) Factoring coyotes into planning decisions will allow for targeted education in these communities to anticipate and avoid potential conflicts, rather than simply being left to react to negative consequences for homeowners and coyotes.
- 5) Provide on-going education and interesting facts about coyote biology and behaviour so that people are given the 'tools' to avoid conflicts as well as feel empowered in living with coyotes in their neighbourhood.
- 6) Adopt proven strategies used in cities like Toronto, Oakville, Niagara Falls that are built around public education and detailed response guidelines.
- 7) Like the above cities, use wildlife organizations having expertise with respect to coyotes to develop a Strategy Framework.

Prepared by Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre  
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