

Urban Coyote Management:

A guide on how to protect your family and pets

Over the past half century, contact between humans and coyotes has become an ever-present reality for DuPage County residents. This trend has been occurring all over North Eastern Illinois.

Wildlife management is under the direct purview of the state; however, the county level of government serves an important role in coyote mitigation. In the year 2000, a comprehensive study of Cook Counties' urban coyotes was undertaken. This study found that there were few effective direct and indirect methods to manage coyotes. The two major direct methods for coyote mitigation consisted of removal and relocation. Lethal removal of coyotes must be performed by a state licensed Wildlife Removal Specialist and is often accompanied by a great deal of public opposition. Trapping and relocating specific nuisance coyote has been found to be a relatively ineffective method for dealing with a habituated population of coyotes.

The most effective and prominent indirect method of management is through public education. Informing citizens about coyote behavior leads to fewer adverse human-coyote interactions. Perhaps the most important role for County government is becoming a central reference point where residents can find important information regarding coexistence with urban coyotes.

Overview of Coyotes in North East Illinois

A relatively recent phenomenon, coyotes have become the top carnivores in an increasing number of metropolitan areas across North America, including one of the largest urban centers in the Midwest and in the Chicago metropolitan region. Historically, coyote's natural habitat was located in the central United States and Mexico. However, coyotes have dramatically increased their range across North America. This expansion in distribution is distinctive, as other large carnivore populations, such as wolves and bears, have disappeared from many portions of the United States, leading to the absence of large carnivores in most urban landscapes.

Compared to other urban wildlife, little is known about how coyotes are becoming successful in landscapes dominated by people. In the year 2000, a groundbreaking, comprehensive study of the habits and effects of the increasing coyote population in North Eastern Illinois was undertaken by Ohio State and Cook County Animal Control. This ongoing study captures coyotes and fits them with radio-collars in order to identify and monitor their home ranges. Through 2008, they had captured over 300 coyotes and radio-collared over 250, making this the largest urban study of coyotes in the world. This study uncovered a great deal of information regarding the positive ecological effects as well as the indirect and direct management strategies for managing coyotes.

Effects of Urban Coyotes

The vast majority information available to the public regarding urban coyotes comes from newspapers or other media that usually focus on conflicts, such as pet attacks. However, coyotes have important ecological roles in urban areas. There have been a large number of recent studies addressing the relationships between coyotes and other medium-sized predators, such as raccoons, skunks, and foxes. In some cases, these relationships are clear, but for others, there is only speculation. In rural areas, coyotes often kill red foxes and limit their populations. Below are a few examples of the positive effects of the ecological relationships between coyotes and other wildlife, according to the Ohio State and Cook County Animal Control study:

Rodents: Rodents make up the bulk of the coyote diet in both urban areas and rural areas. Although there has not been a comprehensive study of the rodent-coyote relationship in urban systems, experiments in rural areas have shown that the removal of coyotes results in a dramatic increase in the rodent population. The Ohio State University study observed increases of rodent in areas, such as golf courses, following coyote removal programs. There is also anecdotal evidence that coyotes may assist in controlling the woodchuck population. Areas such as cemeteries and golf courses, have reported declines in woodchuck population once coyotes appeared.

White-Tailed Deer: Deer are often overabundant and difficult to manage in urban areas. Although coyotes rarely take adult deer, they are primary predators of deer fawns. The Illinois Natural History Survey conducted a fawn survival study in different locations within the Chicago area and found that coyotes killed 20 percent to 80 percent of the fawns in different populations.

Canada Geese: Geese have adapted to urban landscapes much like deer and have become overabundant and a nuisance in many areas. These geese are also a challenge to manage effectively in urban areas. Coyotes are serving as a form of pest control for urban geese through preying on young goslings and goose eggs. As with deer, coyotes do not take enough adult geese to reduce the population, but they can slow the population increase through egg predation.

Feral Cats: Perhaps the most controversial aspects of urban coyotes are their relationships with feral cats. Coyotes prey on cats for sustenance. However, a positive consequence of coyotes removing feral cats is the trickle-down effect. Studies in California urban areas showed that coyotes reduced cats in some habitat fragments, which then resulted in an increase in nesting success for songbirds. Thus, the coyote serves as a top predator by removing an important smaller predator, the cat, resulting in birds and perhaps other species subsequently increasing in number.

Indirect Management Strategies: Education & Human Behavior Modification

Management programs for urban coyotes begin with public education. Residents must become aware of signs of coyotes and understand the differences between true threats and coexistence.

To minimize potential problems with coyotes, residents should:

- Securely store garbage.
- Keep birds feeding areas clean of debris, even well maintained feeders can attract rodents. In turn, this may attract coyotes.
- Use squirrel-proof bird feeders. In an urban environment coyotes naturally feed on mice, voles, rabbits, and woodchucks. When natural prey populations decline, it has been shown that squirrels that visit bird feeders become easy prey for coyotes.
- Feed pets indoors.
- Do not leave small pets like rabbits, cats, or small dogs outside unattended, especially at night.

These strategies are recommended by both the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the University of Illinois. It is also recommended that people living in areas with larger coyote populations should invest in proper, sturdy fencing.

As part of an effective public education campaign, the ILDNR suggests informational signage be placed along nature trails. The ILDRN provides this message as a sample trail sign:

Coyotes occur in this area and are interesting to watch. You and your dog may also be watched by coyotes as you walk in the coyote's territory, or near its den or young. Sometimes coyotes follow behind people and dogs from a short distance. Stay alert, keep dogs leashed, and do not run away from coyotes. If you feel the coyote is getting too close, face the coyote, make loud noises, and toss stones or sticks in the coyote's direction. You may also want to take another route for the next several weeks.

Direct Management Strategies: Removal & Relocation

Lethal Removal: There are instances where coyote habituation is so severe that the coyotes can be considered an immediate threat to people, especially children and pets. This is when removal is warranted. Lethal removal is accomplished through either trapping, euthanasia, or shooting. However, according to the ILDNR, coyotes are difficult to trap or shoot, and these actions should be undertaken by professionals. Grundy County began an aggressive removal program in 2011 by offering a \$15 bounty per slain coyote. This program was funded through private donations and led to the removal of over fifty coyotes in the first month.

However, nuisance coyotes are often easier to capture than those that are non-habituated. Removal programs designed to target individual nuisance coyotes will be more successful than broad programs, which have a goal of removing a complete population of coyotes. It is difficult to capture all coyotes residing in an area, and as coyotes are removed, they are replaced by solitary ones. These concentrated removals must be executed by professionals possessing a state issued Commercial Wildlife Removal Permits. The following individuals possess the permit:

- Dan Dolan - 815-378-3651, Animal Damage control, Inc., Kankakee
- Rob Erickson - 815-286-3073, On Target ADC, DeKalb
- Kraig Kaatz - 708-687-1178, Oak Forest

- Bob Krach - 847-658-7874, Bob's Animal Removal, Lake in the Hills
- Brad Lundsteen - 630-443-4500, Suburban Wildlife Control, Elgin
- Mike Marchewka - 815-479-8509, Crystal Lake
- Glenn Meade - 847-991-9909, Critter Control of Illinois, Palatine
- Bill Paulsen - 847-356-4173, Lindenhurst
- Irv Schirmer - 815-923-2229, Marengo
- Steve Stronk - 708-672-9362, Steve's Wildlife Removal, Crete
- Gary Zirves - 815-861-4929, Illinois Wildlife Control, Woodstock

Relocation: A similar option commonly used as a compromise, is to remove coyotes with trapping and then relocate them to a distant site. Relocation has been found to be rarely effective for any species and particularly coyotes. However, many removal programs still relocate coyotes with the understanding that it will likely result in the death of that individual because relocation is more palatable to the general public than euthanasia.

Recommendations

According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the county level of government traditionally has not had an active role in mitigation. Due to the fact that coyotes are regulated exclusively by the state, the county has minimal direct responsibility. The state and private citizens have usually shouldered the responsibility for coyote removal. Due to the state's current financial hardship, few resources have been allocated to coyote removal. ILDRN's current policy is directing citizens who are dealing with nuisance coyotes to a licensed wildlife removal specialist for relocation.

However, according to Dan Thompson, Ecologist with the DuPage County Forest Preserve, DuPage County government can play a vital part in educating the public on how to safely interact and coexist with coyotes. The County website can serve as a central reference point where residents can find important information regarding urban coyotes. This information can include methods to avoid confrontation with coyotes as well as a list of certified animal removal specialists.