

Getting to know coyotes

The coyote, *Canis latrans*, was present in Illinois before European settlers arrived. Their numbers increased when settlers moved to Illinois and the removal of timber began. Journals kept by settlers suggest that coyotes, then referred to as *prairie wolves*, were abundant in Illinois in the early 1800s, but by the mid-1800s their populations were dwindling. This trend was linked to the decrease in prey populations caused by habitat loss and overharvest.

When settlers began raising livestock on Illinois prairies in the mid-1800s, programs were created to eliminate all rivals for range land, including coyotes, bison and wolves. By the late 1800s, millions of coyotes had been killed. By the 1950s coyotes were considered rare and programs began to stop their removal. Coyotes started to move across the country filling the niche once filled by cougars and wolves, becoming the top predator. During this time the development of land created edges where rodents and rabbits lived, supplying ample food for the coyote. The coyote, with its adaptable behavior, now lives throughout much of North America.

The coyote is a member of the dog family, similar in appearance to a medium size shepherd. They weigh 20-30 pounds, have pointed ears and a narrow muzzle. Males tend to be larger than females. Pelts are usually grayish-brown, but occasionally black, often with a patch of white chest hair. Their tail is rather bushy and is held down between the hind legs when running. Coyote tracks are narrower and more elongated than dog tracks. Coyotes are referred to as "perfect steppers". This means that their front and rear paws land in the same spot when the coyote is traveling in stride.

North American relatives include arctic foxes, swift foxes, gray foxes, red foxes, red wolves and gray wolves.

Suggested Readings

Adults:

Bauer, Erwin A. *Wild Dogs: The Wolves, Coyotes and Foxes of North America*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books. 1994.

Bekoff, Mark. *Coyotes: Biology, Behavior and Management*. New Jersey: Blackburn Press. 2001.

Parker, Gerry. *Eastern Coyote: The Story of Its Success*. Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing, 1995.

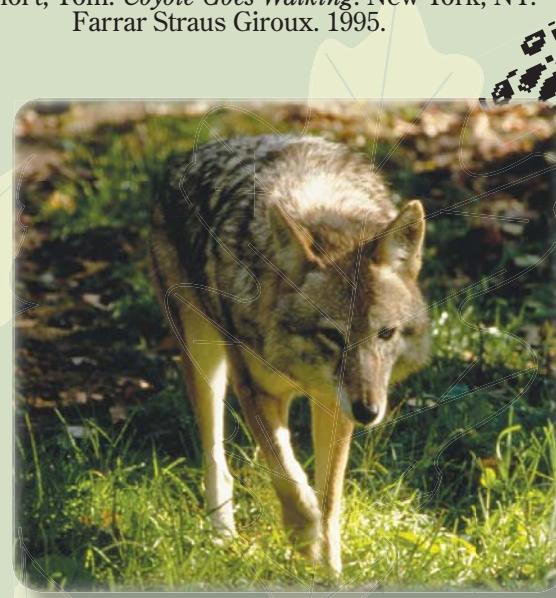
Children:

Begay, Shonto. *Ma'ii and Cousin Horned Toad, A Traditional Navajo Story*. New York, NY: Scholastic Incorporated. 1992.

Phort, Tom. *Coyote Goes Walking*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux. 1995.

Lake County Guide to

Coyotes



Lake County Forest Preserves

www.LCFPD.org

General Offices

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On the move

Coyotes are wanderers most of the year. Their home range can be up to 30 square miles. Within that, coyotes have a core territory of one square mile. The core territory provides the best spots to sleep, raise young and find food.



Denning up

Coyotes are believed to mate for life. During the winter months the mating ritual begins. A den may be used year after year and is often a modified fox or woodchuck burrow. In early spring, six to eight pups are born inside the den. The pups are born helpless and depend on the parents to feed them. The female stays with the pups while the male hunts for food. At three weeks of age, the pups are venturing out of the den. In the fall, pups are able to live on their own and establish their own home range. However, some stay with the parents for one or two seasons and help raise the next year's litter.

Mealtime

Coyotes are opportunistic predators and feed on a wide variety of food. They consume rabbits and an assortment of small rodents. Coyotes will also eat birds, frogs, skunks, berries, insects and the occasional beaver. Although they will feed upon the remains of deer, deer are usually not killed by coyotes unless the deer is injured. It is recommended that people keep their garbage cans closed and keep pet food inside since these make easy meals for coyotes and other wildlife species. Keeping your dog on a leash will also reduce encounters with coyotes.

Recent studies show that coyotes have become predators of goose nests. Coyotes raid the nests, taking as many as 20 eggs from a group of nests in a single evening. They then dig caches, or hiding spots, nearby to store the eggs. Coyotes return later to eat the eggs, sometimes as many as three weeks after they were cached.

Yip, yip, yip, yooooooo!

Have you heard coyotes howling in the night? Growls, howls, whines and yips are among the 11 known vocalizations that coyotes perform. These vocalizations produce complex sounds that trick human ears into thinking there are multiple coyotes when only two coyotes are howling. They also communicate through scent marking, postures and facial expressions. Scat of this species is often found in the middle of trails, this is done to mark territory.



Coyote *Canis latrans* Body Length: 44-52"

Lake County's Other Wild Dogs



Red fox *Vulpes vulpes*
Body Length: 35-41"

be difficult to spot this species, as it is shy and primarily nocturnal. Red foxes are omnivorous. They eat corn, berries, fruits, acorns, insects, birds and small mammals. A key to identification of this species is the white tip on the end of its tail, a unique trait among North American members of the dog family.



Gray fox *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*
Body Length: 31-44"

Gray foxes occur throughout most of the southern half of North America, however they are rare in Lake County. These foxes can be found in deciduous woodlands, but are occasionally seen in old fields foraging for fruits and insects. Gray foxes are unique because they can climb trees. They have strong, hooked claws that allow them to scramble up trees to avoid predators or get fruit. Gray foxes are nocturnal or active at dawn and dusk. They den during the day in hollow trees, stumps or old woodchuck burrows. Gray foxes have a black tipped tail, which distinguishes this species from red foxes. The Forest Preserve District is currently conducting a census on this rare species. Please contact Jennifer Filipiak, 847-968-3283, with any sightings of this fox.

Red foxes are found in wooded areas, brushlands and old fields throughout most of the United States. Even in areas where fairly common, it can

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