

# The Urban Coyote

## LIFE SPAN:

- The urban coyote typically lives between 2-3 years old.
- The most common cause of death:
  - Motor vehicle collisions.
- Coyotes are susceptible to:
  - Sarcoptic mange, rabies, canine distemper & parvovirus.
- In Illinois, the coyote has no remaining natural predators.



## IDENTIFICATION:

The coyote is a medium-sized member of the dog family that includes wolves & foxes. Coyotes are commonly mistaken as a medium-sized dog, often resembling a German Shepherd or Collie.

### Coloring:

- Grayish-brown; or yellow-gray.
- Guard hairs tipped in black.

### Size:

- *Body Length:*
  - 3-4.5 ft.
- *Height:*
  - 23-26 in.
- *Tail Length:*
  - 11-16 in.

### Tail:

- Drooping, bushy tail.
- Black tip on the tail.
- Holds its tail down between the hind legs when running.

### Weight:

- Most coyotes weigh between 25-35 lbs.
- Larger individuals can weigh around 40 lbs.

### Ears:

- Large, upright/pointed ears.
- Fur often has a tinge of red behind the ears & around the face.

### Eyes:

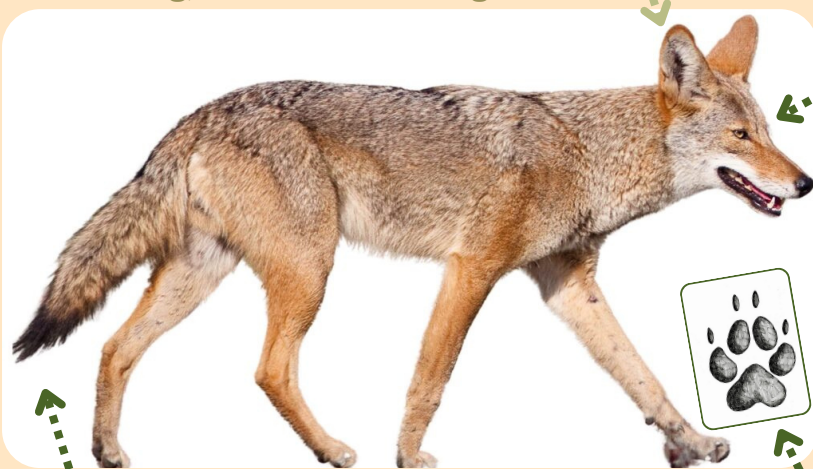
- Yellow, rather than brown.

### Nose:

- Long, slender muzzle/snout.
- Pointed nose.

### Tracks:

- Oval-shaped.
- Has a larger heel impression.
- Tracks will appear in a straight line.



## DIET:



- Primarily eat small mammals:
  - Small rodents (mice, rats, voles)
  - Rabbits
- Other:
  - Birds
  - Snakes
  - Fruit
  - Insects
  - Fish
  - Animal carcasses
- Opportunistic feeding:
  - Garbage
  - Pet food (left out)



## ECOLOGICAL BALANCE:

### Rodents:

- Small rodents are a primary food source.
- Studies have shown that removal of coyotes results in rodent increases.

### Canadian Geese:

- Geese have adapted to urban landscapes.
- At times they become overabundant & a nuisance.
- Studies have shown that coyotes can slow the population through nest/egg predation.



### Feral Cats:

- Coyotes may prey upon free-roaming cats for food, or to remove them as potential competitors (for resources).
- Studies have shown that coyotes reduce or restrict cats in some habitats.
  - Resulting in increases in nesting success for birds.
  - Keeping natural spaces open for more wildlife.

### White-Tailed Deer:

- Deer are often overabundant & difficult to manage in urban areas.
- Coyotes help slow population growth in high-density areas.

### Influences on Diet:

- Studies have shown that urban coyotes eat a diet that is high in carbohydrate-rich foods.
  - Provided unintentionally by people's compost, garbage, etc.
- This has resulted in altered microbes, negatively affecting body condition; further resulting in:
  - An increase in parasite susceptibility & conflict-prone behavior.



## HABITAT:

- Coyotes inhabit virtually every available territory in Cook County.
  - Typically prefer open areas, such as prairies.



## COYOTE DEN:

- Pup season is the only time when coyotes will voluntarily use a den.
  - Otherwise, coyotes will sleep above ground, in the open or under cover.
- Usually prefer some protective cover at the den.
  - Example: Bushes or trees
  - Some type of slope for drainage.

- Can build dens from scratch by digging a hole.
- Dens can consist of:
  - Hallowed-out tree stumps, rock outcrops, existing burrows made by other medium-sized animals, etc.

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## PRESENCE OF COYOTES:

### Howling:



- Coyotes can emit a range of sounds, including:
  - Howls, barks, "yips", and whines.
- Howling signals the occupancy of a territory to other coyotes (by group howling).
- Serves as a social bonding mechanism within the pack.

### Scat:



- Feces deposited by coyotes.
- Found/visible in scat:
  - Small bones, fur, or vegetable matter
- Coyotes use scat to communicate:
  - They will deposit scat in the middle of trails (or) near the borders of their territory.

### Tracks:



- Coyotes travel in a straight line.



## REPRODUCTION:



### 1 BREEDING:

- Breeding/mating season begins in February.
  - Or early March.
- Coyotes have strong family bonds.
  - Pairs typically mate for life.

### 2 GESTATION:

- Gestation period lasts between 58-65 days.
- *April:*
  - The female will begin looking for existing dens, or dig one herself.

### 3 BIRTH:

- Young/pups are born during late April or May.
- Typically produce 1 litter per year.
- *Litter Size:*
  - Range from 4-7 pups.
  - Typically: 6-7 pups.

### 6 FAMILY:

- By 6 to 9-months-old:
  - Young are self-sufficient.
  - But remain with their families after they leave the den.
- Late or early fall:
  - Most young coyotes will be on their own.

### 5 WEANING:

- Pups are weaned by the time they are 2-months-old.
- *2 to 3-months-old:*
  - Begin to learn to hunt.
- By the end of summer:
  - Pups are spending time away from parents.
  - Attempting to hunt on their own/with siblings.

### 4 RAISING:

- Males will bring food to the female & pups.
  - Pups are fed by their mothers for ~1 month.
- 6-weeks-old:
  - Pups are able to eat solid food.
  - Begin traveling short distances with adults.

### 7 SIGHTINGS:

- Coyotes remain in parent-offspring units.
  - Usually hunt alone, or in male-female pairs.
- Sightings increase during the first half of the year.
  - As year-old males start to look for their own territories.
- Many first-year females will stay with their parents for another year/through the following summer.
  - To help raise the next year's litter.

## BEHAVIOR:

### Seasonal Variations:

- Coyotes are highly adaptable.
  - Survive in many habitats.
  - Develop altered behavior traits & characteristics.

### Territorial:

- *February to March:*
  - During breeding season.
- The presence of coyote pups can elevate negative adult-coyote behaviors.
  - May attempt to escort you away from den site.

### NOCTURNAL:

- Coyotes are mostly nocturnal.
  - Most active from dusk until dawn.
  - Sometimes seen/active during the day.
- This is an adaptive strategy.
  - Shift activity to hours of less human presence
  - To help avoid confrontation with humans.

### SOUNDS:

- Communicate with a variety of vocalizations:
  - "Yip-yaps," barks & howls.
- Sounds carry 2-3 miles.

### HUMANS:

- Coyotes are generally skittish/wary of humans.
  - Prefer to keep their distance.
- Elusive & fearful.
- We influence their behavior.

