

Living with Wildlife – Coyotes – Part II

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Understanding why a species acts in a certain way is crucial to responding in an informed way. Fear is furthered by ignorance. And, what we fear, we kill.

This is certainly the case with coyotes whose persecution is legendary. And, it is not only proven to be unwarranted but also ineffective in solving any perceived or real conflicts.

The first myth is that coyotes prey on people's pets. It is true that if we are irresponsible enough to leave a cat or small dog out unattended in a natural area, we risk losing them to a coyote but, more often than not, it is a fisher that is the culprit as far as missing cats are concerned.

An extensive study on urban coyotes showed that the foundation of their diet was small rodents, primarily mice and voles, augmented by rabbits, hares and deer.

Surprisingly, 23% of their diet consists of fruit, one of the reasons they are often seen around apple orchards or properties with crab apple trees in the fall.

Although they are a diurnal (daytime) species, to avoid conflict with humans, coyotes can and do change their peak activity levels to night.

Coyote sightings over the winter months increase for several reasons. Without foliage, they are more easily seen and they also have to extend their foraging times and territory to compensate for the fact that food is harder to find. But the biggest reason is that they are simply following their primary diet – mice – and, as you know, mice move closer to our heated homes during the winter.

Many of us rural dwellers are grateful to see coyote tracks in the snow around the perimeter of our homes because we know they are keeping mice in check, they are not after women and children!

Coyotes are susceptible to sarcoptic mange, consisting of microscopic mites that cause itching and loss of hair. This can have deadly consequences, particularly during the winter months, as it severely limits the animal's ability to maintain body heat. However, it is easily treatable with a parasitic product, ivermectin. We heard of one farmer who successfully treated several coyotes by putting a dose of it in food bait on his property once a week for a few weeks.

Next week, we'll take a look at the coyote's contribution to biodiversity while considering the futility of killing coyotes and provide some tips on how we can coexist with the coyote.

In the meantime, check out www.wildlifeinfo.ca for all your wildlife questions.