

Living with Wildlife – Coyotes – Part III

By Donna DuBreuil, President

Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre – www.wildlifeinfo.ca

Attempts to control coyote populations by culling often lead to the opposite effect, thereby increasing overall pack size. For example, if either the alpha male or female within a pack is killed, the resulting effect can be ovulation in all breeding-age females and an increase in both the number of litters and number of pups per litter.

Also, the resulting disturbance on the social structure of the pack can lead to more human-wildlife conflicts as less experienced coyotes will go for easier prey, including people's pets.

As for coyotes being a threat to people, consider that only two humans have ever been killed by a coyote in all recorded history. In contrast, millions of children are bitten by dogs annually in North America and, on average, twenty human deaths are attributed to dogs each year in the US.

On the other hand, a number of new studies are teaching us the significant role coyotes contribute to biodiversity. As an apex predator, it has the ability to control all species below it on the food chain, a phenomenon referred to as the top down effect. Removing coyotes from a habitat creates a huge imbalance that threatens ecological stability.

For example, coyotes control of rodent populations is of great benefit to agriculture. Coyotes presence has also been found to have a positive effect on duck nesting success given their ability to control other animals that prey more heavily on ducks and their eggs. For the same reason, ground-nesting songbirds have more success in areas of coyote abundance.

Rather than the senseless and irrational slaughter of coyotes, we need to take the precautions that come with having the privilege of still having abundant natural areas and wildlife around us.

The majority of farmers prevent livestock predation by using guard animals, proper fencing, sheltering animals during the birthing season and not disposing of dead stock on their property, attracting coyotes.

Homeowners need to ensure that they don't intentionally or unintentionally feed coyotes by securing garbage, cleaning up around bird feeders and practicing responsible pet ownership by not leaving cats or dogs unattended outside. The latter is particularly important during the fall and winter months when coyotes are having to range farther for food, tracking the mice that move closer to our homes.

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