

TIPS TO AVOID COYOTE CONFLICTS

DO NOT FEED COYOTES – FEEDING COYOTES CAUSES AGGRESSION TO HUMANS

- Educate and/or report person's leaving food or attractants outdoors, particularly important if you notice coyotes in your area.

PROTECTING YOUR PROPERTY

- Store garbage indoors until collection day
- Secure garbage and compost in durable plastic or steel containers with locking lids
- Remove bird feeders and seed spillage that attracts rodents and their predators
- Feed pets indoors
- Clean BBQ grills and tools after each use
- Trim shrubs and remove rodent habitats such as rock piles or wood piles from your yard
- Wildlife proof gardens, pick ripened fruit and clean up windfalls
- Install motion sensor lights or sprinklers
- Install a 6' solid fence and extend with mesh underground to prevent burrowing
- Install coyote rollers on fencing
- Enclose crawl spaces beneath decks and sheds

PROTECTING YOUR PETS

- Keep Cats Indoors
- Keep dogs on a short 5' leash
- Do not allow your dog to chase wildlife
- Check your property for wildlife before letting your pet outside
- After dark or at dusk take your pet out on a short leash
- Do not house rabbits, fowl or other pets outdoors
- Vaccinate your pet against rabies
- Follow property tips

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY

- Never Leave Young Children Unattended
- Teach children not to approach or harass wildlife or pets
- Avoid Walking Alone in Areas with Coyotes
- Avoid Walking at Dusk and Dawn or after Dark
- Carry Protection - Personal Alarm, Umbrella, Flash light, Cell Phone

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A COYOTE

- Stay calm and wait until they move away
- Do not turn your back or run. (Like dogs, coyotes are hardwired to give chase if you run)
- If approached, stand tall, waive your arms, make yourself as large as you can. Clap, yell, shout loudly, make startling movements, throw an object towards the animal. (Coyotes are hardwired to avoid scary situations or aggressive behaviour)
- Startle the animal by opening an umbrella, using a flashlight, activating an audible alarm

COYOTE FACTS

- Coyotes are an important part of our ecosystem as they control rodent and rabbit populations. According to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources they flourish in cities across Canada and they are here to stay.
- Coyotes have been a common sight in Mississauga residential neighbourhoods for over 20 years. They are active day and night but prefer to hunt after dusk or before dawn.
- Coyotes are normally shy towards humans; however they will watch or follow humans out of natural curiosity. Coyotes are hardwired to run from aggressive actions.
- Coyotes and humans can coexist safely but we must know how to keep our pets safe and prevent conflicts. Coyotes will prey on outdoor, off leash or unattended pets.
- MNR Officials report that the reason coyotes become a problem for communities is due to human habituation caused by intentional or unintentional feeding. Feeding of wildlife is prohibited under City of Mississauga Animal Care and Control By-law 0098-04.
- Coyotes cannot be easily trapped and relocated. They cannot be easily relocated as vacant habitat is not available for them. Provincial Law prohibits the relocation of wildlife beyond a km. range. Studies have shown that relocated animals often die and their young often starve. Removing one coyote only allows for a vacant territory to be filled by another animal.

To Report Unusual Wildlife Activity or the Feeding of Wildlife Contact Animal Services at:

905-896-5858 – Monday to Friday 8:00am-4:00pm
After Hours, Weekends and Holidays – 905-615-3000

In the Case of Immediate Threat to Personal Safety Call - 911

This information has been provided by the City of Mississauga Animal Services. For additional wildlife information visit our web site at www.mypetmississauga.ca



“PLEASE DON’T FEED THE WILDLIFE”

Feeding of wildlife is prohibited in the City of Mississauga as per the Mississauga Animal Care and Control By-law #0098-04, as noted below:

REQUIREMENTS OF ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL BY-LAW 0098-04

PART IV: FEEDING OF WILDLIFE

- 10) No person shall intentionally feed a wild animal or leave food or attractants of any type or in any form out of doors in such a manner as to attract, or be accessible by a wild animal, feral or stray domestic animal on private or public property. (242-11)
- 11) Section 10 does not apply to the feeding of song birds on a property, provided the following feeding requirements are met by the owner or occupier: (242-11)
 - (1) seed is placed in a bird feeding device that is sufficiently above grade as to not attract or be accessible by wild animals; and
 - (2) bird feeding practices do not attract large flocks of homing birds such as wild, feral or domestic pigeons; and
 - (3) spillage of seed upon the ground is removed by the property owner or occupier forthwith and disposed of in such a manner that it does not attract wild animals, feral or stray domestic animals.
- 12) Section 10 does not apply in the following situations: (242-11)
 - (1) the leaving of food as bait in a trap by a property owner to capture a nuisance animal inhabiting or habituating their property pursuant to the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, 1997, S.O.1997, c.41
 - (2) the leaving of food as bait by a licensed trapper, and employee of a licensed wildlife or pest control agency, Municipal Law Enforcement Officer an Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Inspector or a Mississauga Peel Police Office, in the performance of their work.
 - (3) The leaving of food for a colony of stray or feral cats for the purposes of trap, neuter or spay and release program approved by the City of Mississauga.

Maximum Penalty for Contravention of this By-Law is \$5000.00

WHY YOU SHOULD NOT FEED WILDLIFE

Wildlife experts agree that feeding wildlife causes problems for the animals and discourages the feeding of wildlife for the following reasons;

- The feeding of wild animals causes them to become dependent on a food source making them unwilling to forage naturally for food which could seriously affect their health. For instance, squirrels are at risk of developing Metabolic Bone Disease if their diet consists mainly of nuts. This condition causes their bones to become brittle and break easily, and in advanced stages, is irreversible and fatal.
- The feeding of wild animals creates an unnatural increase in wildlife populations thereby causing an increase in nuisance wildlife activity. Squirrels and raccoons will take up residence in neighbouring attics while skunks prefer burrowing beneath sheds, decks and solariums so that they may be close to the food source. Raccoons maintain a common ‘latrine’ area on neighbouring properties which can become a health hazard to humans.

- This unwanted wildlife activity causes frustrated area residents to take unwanted action such as trapping and relocating animals that are merely trying to take advantage of a food source.
- Studies have shown that trapping and relocation causes orphaned young to die of starvation and diseases to spread, infecting healthy animal populations. NOTE: Re-location of trapped animals beyond 1km is prohibited under the Provincial Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.
- Excessive feeding of birds generates larger populations of hardy non-native birds such as feral pigeons, starlings and sparrows which compete for habitat with our rarer, native song bird species.
- Ducks naturally feed on vegetation and water insects. A nutritionally deficient diet of seed or bread will cause illness and disease. Birds may become ill from bacteria ridden food that is not consumed or bacteria levels in the watercourse due to large concentrations of birds and faeces. Ducks that have become dependant on human handouts may not fly south and starve or freeze during winter months.
- Improperly maintained bird feeders or poor quality bird feed can actually cause birds to die of illnesses such as salmonella, botulism or other deadly bacterial infections.
- Providing food for birds and squirrels often attracts rats and mice due to the spillage of seed.
- An increase in rodent activity can attract larger predators like coyotes and foxes which can also prey on neighbourhood pets.
- Predators such as coyotes that have eaten human food lose their natural fear for humans and as a result they can become predatory towards humans. If a predator such as a coyote becomes a danger to human safety wildlife authorities recommend the destruction of the offending animal as it can no longer coexist safely with humans.

The City of Mississauga encourages residents to enjoy and live in harmony with our native wildlife. This can only be accomplished if we do not interfere with a wild animal's natural instincts, behaviours and ability to forage for food. If you enjoy wildlife, a better alternative would be the planting of certain native flora that will enhance your property and attract wildlife naturally without altering their behaviour or diet.

RECOMMENDED CODES OF PRACTICE TO AVOID WILDLIFE CONFLICTS

- Store garbage, green bins, recycling, compost etc. in an area inaccessible to wildlife.
- Place garbage, recycling and green bins to the curb on the morning of collection.
- Remove any debris or materials from property/decks/balconies that may provide hiding or nesting sites for wild animals or rodents.
- Conduct a spring and fall exterior home inspection to ensure shingles, eaves, soffit, fascia, vents etc. are in good repair.
- Cap/screen roof, dryer, bathroom vents and chimney's with secure, safety approved mesh.
- Sheds, decks or any structure without a foundation should be screened below ground in a reverse L formation, (12" down, and 18" away from the structure) to prevent burrowing animals.
- Cover window wells with mesh or commercial window well covers.
- Trim tree branches away from the roof of your home.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: What Municipalities Need to Know

Who's Responsible for What?

The Ministry of Natural Resources helps landowners and municipalities deal with human-wildlife conflict by making referrals to appropriate agencies and providing information on managing problem animals and hiring a wildlife control agent.

The Ministry of Natural Resources also provides municipalities with information necessary to obtain authorizations to kill problem coyotes. The authorization has conditions on targeting specific problem coyotes such as those that are killing livestock. These authorizations are for relatively short periods and are confined to specific geographic areas where problem coyotes have been identified.

Ministry of Natural Resources authorization can also be issued under specific circumstances for other species, including white-tailed deer or elk, that are causing damage.

For more information
and fact sheets on
what you can do visit

ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Scan here for more
information on
Living with Wildlife



Prevention First

There are several ways landowners, including municipalities, can discourage coyotes from entering their property. These include keeping the areas near buildings free from clutter, cutting down grass and weeds and repairing any openings under buildings where coyotes may den or bed down.

Help Available for Landowners who Have Lost Livestock

Under the Ontario Livestock, Poultry and Honey Bee Protection Act (LPHBPA), livestock and poultry producers are entitled to make claims to their local municipality for livestock losses attributable to attacks by wolves, coyotes or dogs.

For more information on livestock predation visit ontario.ca/predation

Lethal Action as a Last Resort

A landowner may humanely kill or trap coyotes that are damaging or about to damage their property. Firearm regulations and bylaws must be followed.

Landowners in central and northern Ontario — roughly north of the Severn River, Bancroft and Pembroke — must report coyotes killed in protection of property to their local Ministry of Natural Resources office.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE:

The Nature of Coyotes

Ontario is home to over 30, 000 different species of animals and plants. This biodiversity provides us with many benefits, including healthier communities.

The Ministry of Natural Resources helps manage wildlife in Ontario and reduce conflict between people and species. We help people find ways to conserve nature and protect their family and property.

What is a Coyote?

The eastern coyote, found throughout much of southern Ontario and agricultural areas in the north, is a hybrid between the smaller western coyote and the eastern wolf.

Adult females weigh an average of 13 to 16 kilograms, while males' average weight varies between 16 and 18 kilograms.

Coyotes are territorial animals, with their territory ranging from a few square kilometres where food is abundant to more than 100 square kilometres where food is very scarce.

Diet

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and will consume a variety of foods, including meat, carrion (dead animals), fruit and vegetables.

In winter, their diet consists mainly of rabbits, hares and deer when the snow is so deep that the deer's mobility is restricted. In spring, summer and fall, coyotes prey mainly on small mammals (fox, rodents, rabbits, mice and voles) and eat wild berries, birds, amphibians, grasshoppers and deer fawns.

Life Cycle

Coyotes often mate for life. Mated pairs usually breed in February, with pups born in April or May. Litters average five or six pups, but can range from two to 10. Both parents share pup-rearing duties, and begin to teach the pups hunting skills when the pups are eight to 10 weeks old.

Juveniles usually leave their parents' territory during their first autumn or winter to establish their own territory. What are sometimes referred to as "packs" of coyotes are generally an adult breeding pair and their pups from the most recent litter.

In some areas, coyotes can live eight to 12 years. In areas where they are hunted, or in populated areas like southern Ontario where vehicle collisions are common, the average life expectancy is less than five years.

Habitat

Coyotes are most commonly associated with open, agricultural landscapes interspersed with woodlots and other brushy terrain. They are also found in green spaces and industrial areas within cities.



Behaviour

Since migrating to Ontario more than 100 years ago, coyotes have adapted well to both rural and urban environments. The eastern coyote is now an integral and permanent part of our diverse landscape.

Many people hear coyotes without ever seeing them because of their night time howls, barks and yips. Coyotes howl to broadcast occupancy of their territory and keep members of the family group aware of each other's locations while hunting or travelling alone. Howling may also help co-ordinate some feeding activities.

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. They have adapted well to living near humans and development. In urban areas, they tend to be nocturnal, typically roaming at night looking for food and spending the daylight hours bedded in bushy or wooded areas.

It is unusual for coyotes to show no fear of humans. Coyotes displaying no fear of humans or exhibiting aggressive behaviours have likely been habituated to people through direct or indirect feeding.

Size of Populations

Coyote populations normally fluctuate in response to the abundance or scarcity of food. When food supplies are limited, they experience a higher mortality rate and lower reproduction rates.

Humans account for the majority of coyote deaths through hunting, trapping and motor-vehicle accidents.

For more information
and fact sheets on
what you can do visit

ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Scan here for more
information on
Living with Wildlife



Diseases

Coyote diseases or parasites are rarely a risk to humans.

Rabies is rare in coyotes in Ontario. Coyotes may actually help to reduce the incidence of rabies in Ontario since they often prey on foxes, a species more likely to carry the disease.

Mange is common in coyote populations in Ontario. Mange is caused by a parasitic mite that burrows into the outer layer of the skin, resulting in loss of fur, extreme irritation and can cause death.

Conflicts

In a small number of cases coyotes lose their fear of people and start preying on livestock. These problem coyotes require more serious measures. There are tools for farmers and rural landowners that will help them deal with coyote conflicts and predation.

Visit ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife





LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Encounters with Coyotes

People and wild animals live side by side in Ontario. We all share responsibility for preventing and handling human-wildlife conflicts.

Coyotes find their way to residential areas where they may tear open garbage, cause concern for residents and even come into conflict with pets.

Avoiding Coyote Conflicts

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. However, they are wild animals and should not be approached.

People should never feed coyotes. Feeding them makes the animals less fearful of humans and habituates them to foods provided by humans. Never attempt to "tame" a coyote.

Do not let pets chase coyotes as it could result in injuries to your pet.

For more information
and fact sheets on
what you can do visit

ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Scan here for more
information on
Living with Wildlife



What to do if you Encounter a Coyote

Coyote sightings are commonplace. If you see a coyote, keep your distance and the animal will most likely avoid you.

If you encounter an aggressive coyote, there are several things you should know and do.

- Never approach or touch a coyote.
- Do not turn your back on, or run from, a coyote.
- Back away from the coyote while remaining calm.
- Stand tall, wave your hands and make lots of noise.
- Carry a flashlight at night to scare off coyotes.
- If a coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 911.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Coyote-proofing your Property



What You Can Do

People and wild animals live side by side in Ontario. Preventing a problem is a far better solution than dealing with wildlife after a conflict.

As a property owner, you have a role in making sure you are not attracting wildlife to your property that you don't want there.

For more information
and fact sheets on
what you can do visit

ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Scan here for more
information on
Living with Wildlife



Preventing Encounters

Limit attractants:

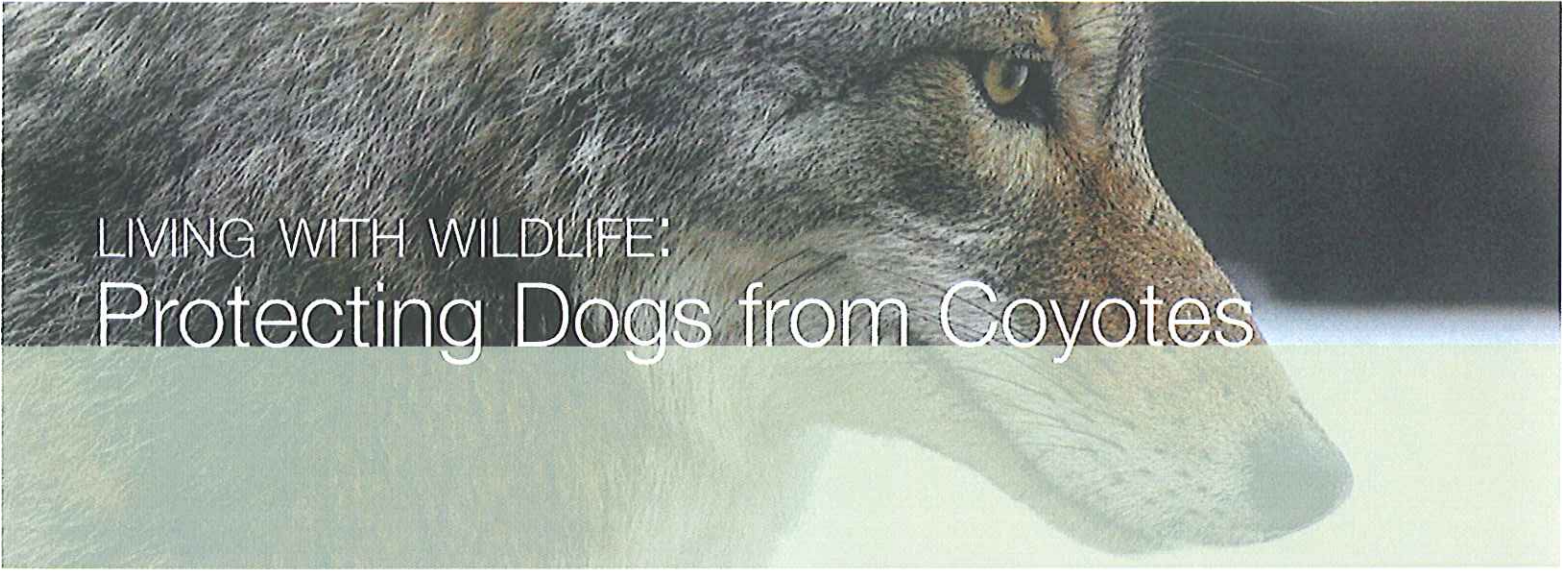
- Keep pet food indoors
- Use secure garbage containers with locking lids and store in an enclosed structure.
- Put garbage out the morning of a scheduled pickup.
- Use enclosed composting bins rather than exposed piles.
- Pick ripe fruit and seed from trees and remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Protect vegetable gardens with heavy-duty garden fences or place vegetable plants in a greenhouse.

Discourage coyotes from entering your property:

- Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes may find cover and small animals.
- Use motion sensor lights.
- Close off spaces under porches, decks and sheds. Coyotes use these areas for denning and raising young.
- If you fence your property, install a two-metre-high fence that extends at least 20 centimetres underground as coyotes may dig under a barrier.
- Electric fencing can also help deter coyotes.

To prevent predation if you own livestock

- Where possible, bring your livestock into barns or sheds at night.
- Guard animals, such as donkeys, llamas and dogs can be cost-effective ways to protect livestock from coyotes. Guard animals develop bonds with livestock and will aggressively ward off predators.



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: Protecting Dogs from Coyotes

While coyotes, by nature, are wary of humans, they are opportunistic feeders and have been known to kill small dogs that have been left unattended.

Small dogs may be seen as prey by coyotes, while larger dogs may be injured in a confrontation.

Protecting Your Dog on Your Property

- Coyotes are primarily nocturnal. Keep your dogs inside at night.
- Fence your property with a two-metre-high fence that extends at least 20 centimetres underground as coyotes may dig under a barrier. If you can't fence your yard, keep your dog on leash. If there are coyotes in your area, pet owners should keep a close eye on their pets at all times even if they are in a fenced in yard.
- Clean up after your dog.
Coyotes are attracted to dog feces.
- Keep pet food indoors.

For more information
and fact sheets on
what you can do visit

ontario.ca/livingwithwildlife

Scan here for more
information on
Living with Wildlife



Protecting Your Dog off Your Property

- Keep your dog on leash.
- Carry a flashlight at night to scare off coyotes.
- Do not let your dog chase a coyote as it could result in injury to your dog.

Other tips

- Do not let your dogs roam from your property. Coyote diseases and parasites can be a risk to domestic dog.
- Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, domestic dogs that have not been spayed or neutered.

Natural. Valued. Protected.

Relocating Wildlife: Why it usually does more harm than good

Often when people are in conflict with wildlife, they think the best solution is moving the animal. Wildlife relocation is seen as an easy, quick and humane way to solve conflicts, but this is not usually the case. Relocating wild animals may cause more harm than good, with undesirable consequences for both people and wildlife.

The ministry will relocate wildlife in very limited situations, using scientific research and expertise to do so in a way that is safe for people and animals.



Why can relocating wildlife be harmful?

Resources are limited

Wildlife may have a difficult time meeting their basic needs – food, water and shelter – in unfamiliar areas or areas with limited resources.

Someone is already living there

Wildlife will likely be relocated to areas that are already home to other animals. These animals may not welcome newcomers or share food sources and shelter. This may create stress and conflict among animals, which can lead to injury or death.

Diseases can be spread

Moving animals around increases the chances of introducing or spreading diseases such as rabies. This can decrease wildlife populations and become a threat to humans.

Relocated animals may try to return

Faced with unfamiliar surroundings, competition for limited resources and possible separation from families, wildlife may try to return home. During the journey their chances of becoming injured or killed – such as in vehicle collisions – increase.

Relocation is not a long-term solution

If an area is attractive to wildlife – with good sources of food or shelter – animals may continue to take up residence.

It becomes someone else's problem

Wildlife will seek food, water and shelter wherever it is easily available. Relocated animals that survive may contribute to problems in other areas, especially if they are used to living around people.

What works when humans and wildlife are in conflict?

There are various effective, humane and inexpensive things people can do to prevent and manage human-wildlife conflict instead of relocating wild animals.

For example, many problems can be prevented and managed using methods such as wildlife-proofing your home, practising proper waste management techniques, etc.

For more information on ways to prevent and manage human-wildlife conflict, visit Ontario.ca/wildlife.



What does the law say?

Wildlife relocation is regulated in Ontario under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. If an animal is captured it must be released unharmed in close proximity to the capture site (within 1 kilometer) or, if sick or injured, delivered to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator within 24 hours unless otherwise directed by the Ministry.


PACE LAW FIRM

Your Personal Injury Lawyers
[CLICK HERE](#)
 Motor Vehicle Accidents
 Brain Injuries
 Spinal Cord Injuries
 Slip and Fall
 Disability Claims

MississaugaNews
auction.com
 your online bargain destination

 Blogs | Movies | Videos | Photos | Print Editions
 A FEW CLOUDS 4°C | WEATHER FORECAST
Login with Facebook | Login/Register
Search this Site
Search Mississauga Businesses
[Full Text Archive](#)
Category Business Name

Home News Sports What's On Opinion Community Announcements Jobs Used Cars Real Estate Rentals Classifieds Shopping

HOT TOPICS ALEKSANDRA FIRGAN-HEWIE ST. MICHAEL'S MAJORS 2011-2012 POWER PLANT MISSISSAUGA JUDICIAL INQUIRY

Home » News » Please don't feed...

Small - Large | Print | Email | Add to Favourites |

download your local community news app. click here



Jan Dean | Apr 04, 2012 - 7:38 AM | 1 | Report a Typo or Correction

Please don't feed the coyotes!

If people demonstrated the common sense God gave a goose, Mississauga wouldn't have a coyote problem.

That was the message delivered to more than 100 people who turned out last night at the Central Library for a "Coyote Information" session hosted by the City of Mississauga. The experts on hand included Mississauga Animal Services education officer Linda Dent and Ministry of Natural Resources biologist John Pisapio.

Both agreed the biggest reason residents have problems with coyotes is because we feed them — intentionally or by accident.

"A fed coyote is a dead coyote," said Pisapio. "When coyotes are fed (even accidentally) they lose their fear of humans, and there will be conflict." When there's conflict, the coyote dies.

The way to minimize conflict with coyotes is to eliminate easily available food — your garbage. Dent and Pisapio said coyotes would stay away if we store our trash in animal-proof containers.

Several people at the meeting said they have been followed by coyotes while walking their dogs.

Pisapio said dogs let loose to chase a coyote are "lunch." Cats allowed to roam outside are also fast food for the predators.

Residents must keep the family cat indoors and keep the dog on a short leash (no longer than six feet).

Pisapio said coyotes aren't going anywhere. Urbanization has decimated the wolf population, but coyotes flourish everywhere in Canada except the Arctic.

They're also very smart. He said a sound and light show attached to sensors will scare them away initially, but they'll soon figure out the light and noise can't hurt them.

Pisapio said biologists have only just discovered coyotes use railroad tracks like their own personal 400 series highways. Coyotes tagged with radio or GPS collars travel hundreds of miles.

Relocation isn't the answer, the experts said. That just passes a problem to a neighbouring community. Also, coyotes can find their way back.

In 20 years working for the City, Dent said she's seen how coyote populations go in cycles. Complaints about coyotes in Meadowvale parks peaked in 1999, then dropped dramatically.

Their population increases when there's food, and when it's too high, mange (disease caused by a tiny mite in the animal's skin) culls the population naturally.

This year, calls to Animal Services about coyotes are way up — 62 calls have been received in the past three months compared to 50—60 calls a year between 2009-11.

Dent said the number of coyotes — and the number of complaints — will soon go down.

"When coyote numbers go down the numbers of rodents and rabbits shoot up," said Dent. Rodents, rabbits, raccoons, squirrels, fruit and berries are what coyotes normally eat.

The experts said residents should call 9-1-1 if they feel they're in immediate danger from a coyote.

Call Animal Services to report a sick coyote or one that is behaving oddly. Monday to Friday from 8-4 p.m., they



Coyote ugly. Coyotes wouldn't come so close if we would take more care not to provide them with food, experts say. Store your trash in animal-proof containers and keep your pets indoors. *File photo*

Featured

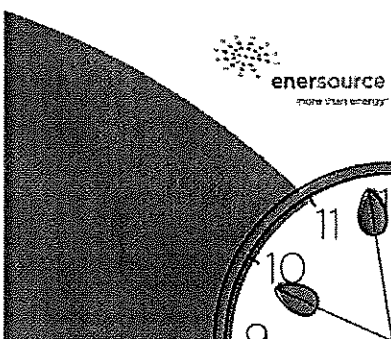


Torstar Network | Apr 03

Paper plane pilots flying high

The scene was amusing: 30 university students from across the country — all male...

Featured Video



Select a City

ABBOTSFORD

46% off Dressings and Marinades

ALLISTON / INNISFIL / ANGUS

54% off Topsoil/Triple Mix

AURORA / NEWMARKET

75% off Duct Cleaning

BARRIE

REGISTER/AGGREGATE NOW - FREE!

Mississauga Top Jobs

The Globe and Mail

Coyote sightings in Toronto triple

theglobeandmail.com | Apr 9th 2012 6:20 PM Ian Merringer

When humans and coyotes encounter each other in cities, the people may actually be more to blame.

The same day that about 80 residents of suburbs west of Toronto filed into their central library for an information meeting about the wild canines, a police officer shot one dead in downtown Toronto's port lands.

Police were attending to a human body that had been found in a wooded area. Although coyotes weren't involved in the death, they had begun to scavenge the corpse. One of them exhibited no fear of people, and was killed when it approached an officer.

A three-fold increase in coyote sightings in 2012 inspired last Tuesday's public information meeting by Mississauga's Animal Services.

The take-home message from the meeting was that coyotes are part of the urban population now and humans have to adjust so both species get along.

Ministry of Natural Resources biologist John Pisapio told the crowd that the "ubiquitous, abundant, common" coyotes are no threat as long as they don't become too familiar with being around people.

Human-sourced food, such as pet food left outdoors, fallen fruit and garbage leads to familiarity, and an animal that is still a wild predator is not a good neighbour, Mr. Pisapio suggested.

Peter George says he regularly sees coyotes lope down his street in southern Mississauga. A few years ago, soon after moving to his house, which backs onto the Credit River, his dog, a miniature pinscher, walked into the trees at the back of his unfenced yard. He heard a yelp and went to investigate. By the time he got there, his dog had been killed by coyotes.

He now has a 120-pound malamute that sleeps in a fenced kennel in his backyard. He says coyotes no longer come on his property, and he frequently sees six or seven rabbits at a time taking refuge near the large dog's enclosure.

Whenever he's out walking with his malamute and three other dogs, the coyotes keep their distance. At some point on the size scale, however, dogs go from being deterrents to prey.

Du Rose, manager of Mississauga Animal Services, says the agency gets a few reports a year of coyote attacks on dogs.

Dave Maloney came close to making one of those calls himself. He was recently walking his 11-pound dog in southern Mississauga not far from the Credit River when he noticed coyotes eyeing him. Soon five of them surrounded him. When the closest was 25 metres away but still seemed intent on getting closer, he picked up his dog and scared the coyotes away by yelling.

Mr. Maloney blames part of that boldness on the misguided feeding of stray cats in the area, which translates into both direct and indirect feeding of coyotes.

He says he's seen a woman driving around the area putting cat food out in parking lots, hydro corridors and alleyways.

"The coyotes come through at night and have a feast," Mr. Maloney says. "I hear they like to eat stray cats, too."

Julian Goss has seen this firsthand. The university professor lives in western Toronto's Brockton neighbourhood, adjacent to the railway lines. One night last fall, he was taking garbage out to his yard when he heard a struggle he describes as sounding like "two Bengal tigers having a go at it."

He looked over the fence into the rail corridor and saw a coyote with a cat pinned down.

"We have this colony of feral cats in our cul-de-sac," Mr. Goss says. "They keep on disappearing."

There's no telling how many cats, stray or otherwise, meet a similar fate each year. Mary Lou Leiher, a supervisor at Toronto Animal Services, confirms that traces of cats are routinely found in coyote scat.

The spread of coyotes across the continent over the past 150 years is a rare biological success story. Once contained to the U.S. southwest by competing wolf populations, the western coyote population expanded to fill vacancies in the food chain as wolves were pushed further to the fringes of North America. They arrived in Ontario around 1920 and made it out to Nova Scotia in 1977.

During this migration, the leading edge of coyotes rubbed up against remnant wolf populations and genetic material was shared. The eastern coyote is significantly larger than its western cousins as a result. Ms. Leiher reports that a typical coyote that Animal Services deals with is around 40 pounds, although those animals may be on the small side since the city usually sees only the injured and sick ones.

Coyotes have proven to be more flexible feeders and breeders than their wolf predecessors, meaning they not only adapt when food supplies vary, but bounce back quickly if humans try to control their numbers with things like poison and bounty hunting. Mr. Pisapio says warm winters like this past one allow gestating mothers to retain fat deposits, which can translate into litters born in April with as many as eight or nine pups, instead of the normal four to six.

It is estimated that 400,000 coyotes are exterminated in the United States every year. Yet, despite this and the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on bounties in North America over the past 150 years, they have become one of the most widely distributed mammals on the continent.

The possibility of a once-fearful coyote becoming too familiar and turning into a problem coyote, like the one that bit an eight-year-old Oakville girl in January, is ever present.

Mr. Pisapio suggests being vigilant about not providing food sources for coyotes is only part of a good management strategy.

"We should ensure that coyotes maintain a healthy fear of people," says Mr. Pisapio, suggesting non-lethal discouragement like waving arms and frightening coyotes on sight. "People should not be approachable. Aversion efforts are entirely appropriate."