



photo courtesy Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources

Coyote Facts

Have you wondered about the newest addition to our wildlife community? Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q: Do coyotes live in Fairfax County?

A: Yes, coyotes arrived in the mid-1970s. Today they are relatively common. As settlers of North America exterminated the gray wolf, the primary predator of coyotes, coyotes expanded their territories. Originally found in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, coyotes spread west to California, north to Canada, and southeast toward Georgia, eventually arriving in the mid-Atlantic states.

Q: Will coyotes stay?

A: Being highly adaptive animals, coyotes can thrive in urban/suburban settings like Fairfax County. As long as they can find food, they can survive.

Q: Are coyotes a threat to humans?

A: There have been incidents of coyotes attacking or biting humans in other parts of the country. Like other wild animals, coyotes that have been fed by humans can lose their fear and become aggressive. Coyotes may also be attracted by pet food or small pets such as cats and small dogs.

Q: How do I know I have seen a coyote?

A: People often mistake foxes or dogs for coyotes or vice versa. Coyotes look like a thin, medium-sized dog with buff sides, gray back, white coloring around the mouth, yellow or orange eyes, and a short bushy tail held downward. In urban settings like Fairfax County, they are usually alone, and explore the landscape looking for small game, fruits and nuts, behaving much like a fox. They congregate in larger family groups to socialize and raise young. It is at these times that they will often bark, yip and howl.

Q. How can I prevent conflict with a coyote?

Eliminate food sources by not putting out pet food or food for wild animals (bird feeders should be elevated and away from homes), secure trash so that it does not attract animals that coyotes eat, and keep small pets indoors when not attended. When coyotes are encountered where you do not want them, do not run. Wave your arms, yell and act threateningly without approaching the

coyote. Your neighbors might think you are crazy, but so will the coyote. Like any member of the dog family, coyotes respect dominance. You must be dominant and let the coyote know – “not here, not now.” Like all dogs, coyotes really just want to know the rules.

If not you, who? Small things.

◆ Learn to appreciate the important role of this medium-sized predator in our communities as well as that of foxes, snakes, hawks and owls.

If not you, who? Big things.

◆ Try to educate your friends and neighbors about the beauty and importance of predators. Teach people how to avoid conflict by removing food sources and challenging coyotes where they are not wanted.

Coyote ...

- ◆ eat small mammals, insects, reptiles, birds, fruit & road kill
- ◆ diets can consist of up to 50% fruit in season
- ◆ have a scientific name, *Canis latrans*, which means “talking dog”



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor’s 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship or call 703-324-8674



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