

Curious Coyote Facts

  The coyote's latin name, *Canis latrans*, translates to "barking dog." Researchers have identified 11 forms of vocal communication used by coyotes, including yips, barks and howls.

  The best runner among the canids, a coyote can leap 14 feet and run 25 - 30 mph, reaching speeds up to 40 mph over short distances.

  Coyotes are strong swimmers and won't hesitate to follow prey into the water.

  Less than 20% of coyote pups survive their first year.

  Early settlers had another name for coyotes: "prairie wolf." This term was possibly coined to distinguish it from the timber wolf, which also roamed the frontier in the past.

  The expansion of coyotes across the United States is largely due to the nearly successful attempts to exterminate the gray wolf.

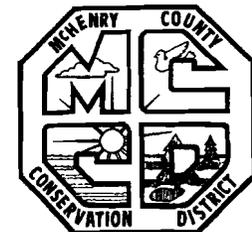
Wild by Nature: Coyotes



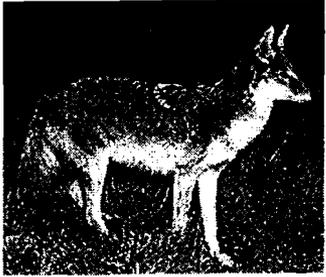
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Coyote Characteristics



courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) somewhat resemble a small German Shepherd dog, often grizzled gray or reddish-gray in color with buff underparts.

They have long rusty or yellowish legs with a dark vertical line on the lower foreleg. The tail is bushy with a black tip and is carried below the level of the back rather than curved upward, even when running. Coyotes reach a shoulder height of about 2 feet and a length of 41 - 60 inches. Males can weigh anywhere from 17½ - 44 pounds while females average slightly smaller at 15 - 40 pounds.

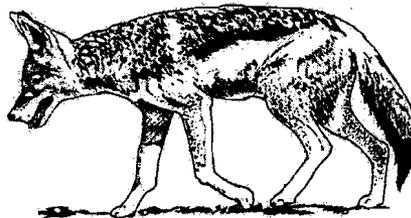
The coyote's habitat is diverse, ranging from the colder temperatures of higher elevations to the searing heat of deserts, from isolated wet grasslands to densely populated suburbia. Coyotes are native to McHenry County and were abundant in Illinois before the first European settlers arrived. Decades of eradication efforts took a toll on the coyote population--as recently as the 1950's, they were considered uncommon in the state. Numbers began to rebound in the 1970's and there are now an estimated 30,000 coyotes living in Illinois.

Coyotes are Illinois' largest wild predator. Their diet is primarily made up of animals such as rabbits, mice, ground squirrels,

raccoons and other small mammals. Being a creature of opportunity, they will also dine on birds, frogs, toads, snakes, insects, various fruits and carrion. They are most active from dusk to the early morning hours, but can be seen at any time of day.

Coyote pairs commonly stay together for life. They mate in February or March, bearing the pups in April or May. When overall coyote population numbers decrease, the number of young per litter increases. Litters average six pups, but could possibly reach as many as 19. The den is usually in a concealed place such as a crevice or underground burrow.

Highly adaptable, coyotes are content to live on their own or in a group. If they are not disturbed (hunted or trapped), they establish strong, organized family packs. The pack may consist of a mated "alpha" (or dominant) pair, young-of-the-year and some offspring from previous years. The members of the group share the duties of guarding the food and territory as well as feeding the pups. Abundance of food determines the ultimate social organization and territory size. Home ranges of coyotes can reach up to 50-70 square kilometers per individual and may change regionally or seasonally.



Frequently Asked Questions:

Why are coyotes coming so close to my house?

The rapid development of McHenry County has caused a tremendous loss of natural habitats, bringing coyotes closer to urban areas. Easy food sources such as pet food, open garbage cans and bird seed all attract coyotes to residential areas.

Do we need to be concerned about the safety of our children and/or pets?

Healthy coyotes are not known to attack humans. On the other hand, small dogs and cats might be seen as potential prey by coyotes. Keep pets in a secured area when outside or accompany them, especially at night, to ensure their safety. As with any wild animal, use caution and do not approach a coyote if you see one.

Is it OK to feed a coyote?

No. Feeding coyotes teaches them to associate humans with food, eventually making them very bold and unafraid.

What is a "coydog"?

Coyotes can interbreed with domestic dogs. The resulting offspring of a coyote and a dog is called a "coydog." These hybrids can resemble a dog, a coyote or a combination of the two. Their behavior is unpredictable and coyotes are often blamed for damage actually caused by coydogs.