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Why Killing Coyotes Doesn't Work

Trapping and killing won't stop conflicts with coyotes

Adapted from the book Wild Neighbors

... children. Dick Randall

For more than a century, human beings have waged a war on coyotes, killing them with poison, traps, guns, hunting dogs, and a variety of other cruel coyote killing methods.

Nonetheless, the wary nature of coyotes and their remarkable adaptability has allowed them to quadruple their range throughout North America.

As a result, communities across the country are encountering coyotes and experiencing conflicts that they have never had to face before. The presence of coyotes in a community can be alarming to those who are not used to living with them.

Occasional attacks by coyotes on pets and coyote aggression toward people (although rare) can trigger alarm from people who fear for the safety of their pets and children. To allay this, communities may feel they need to initiate wide scale programs to trap and kill coyotes.

These killing programs don't work and are inhumane. Better solutions exist.

What does work: Techniques to solve coyote conflicts »

Why don't coyote-killing programs work?

They are ineffective.

It is extremely difficult to ensure that the problem-causing coyote(s) will be the one(s) located and killed

Coyotes removed from an area will quickly be replaced by others. Coyote pairs hold territories, which leaves single coyotes ("floaters") constantly looking for new places to call home.

If attractants in a neighborhood are not removed (e.g., pet food, garbage, etc.) new coyotes in an area can quickly become "nuisance" coyotes.

They won't reduce coyote populations.

Research suggests that when aggressively controlled, coyotes can increase their reproductive rate by breeding at an earlier age and having larger litters, with a higher survival rate among young. This allows coyote populations to quickly bounce back, even when as much as 70 percent of their numbers are removed.

It is nearly impossible to completely eradicate coyotes from an area. Despite bounties and large-scale efforts to kill coyotes over the last 100 years, coyotes have in fact expanded their range throughout the U.S. and Canada tremendously. One study even found that killing 75 percent of a coyote population every year for 50 years would still not exterminate the population.

Removal is costly.

Coyotes are intelligent animals and are difficult to catch. Even a skilled trapper or sharpshooter, at a hefty price tag, will need many hours to catch a targeted coyote.

Trapping is inhumane.

The most common devices used to capture coyotes are leg-hold traps and neck snares. Both can cause severe injuries, pain, and suffering.

Pets become unintended victims of traps set for coyotes. An informal search of media reports suggests thousands of unintended incidents have occurred, causing heartbreak for the families affected.

Non-target wild animals are also caught in traps, and many sustain injuries so severe that they die or must be killed.

What about diseased coyotes?

Some coyote trappers claim that diseased coyotes are to blame for pet attack incidents, and that removing such animals from the population is the answer. This is not the case.

There is no evidence that coyotes with mange are more likely to attack people or pets. Mange-afflicted coyotes can simply appear threatening because they are weak, strange-looking (due to hair loss), and may be found resting in suburban areas during the daytime.

Attacks on dogs during the months of April-December are probably caused by coyotes who have lost their fear of people. This occurs when coyotes are being fed in residential areas and are

not chased away by people.

A 10-year study of over 300 coyotes in the greater Chicago metropolitan area found only two coyotes who had attacked pets. Necropsies done on these coyotes showed that they had been eating pet food, but were otherwise healthy.

Can we relocate coyotes?

Although it may seem like a more humane alternative, relocating coyotes is not a good idea.

Relocating a coyote is most often a death sentence for that animal.

Coyotes are very territorial and occupy large home ranges up to 40 square miles.

If relocated, they will do almost anything to get back home.

Unfamiliar with their new terrain, they are often killed by cars.

They can be injured or killed during territorial disputes with coyotes already established in the area that they are released in.

In addition, state wildlife laws usually prohibit the relocation of coyotes, since they are a rabies-vector species (even though rabies is very rare in coyotes).

What does work?

Coyotes are here to stay—it's up to us to find ways of coexisting with them. A program combining education in techniques to resolve coyote conflicts and how to discourage coyotes offers the best method for handling and preventing conflicts with coyotes, and is working already in a number of communities.

Resources

- » Solutions for Coyote Conflicts Fact Sheet
- » Schedule a Coyote Hazing Training workshop in your community.
- » Living with Wild Neighbors in Urban and Suburban Communities: A Guide for Local Leaders gives elected officials and other decision-makers the tools to implement long-lasting, nonlethal solutions to community wildlife conflicts.
- » Visit Project Coyote: promoting an educated coexistence between

people and coyotes.

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