

*News Article*

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## Concern about coyotes

Coyotes are native to Indiana. Before Europeans settled here, coyotes were primarily restricted to prairie regions of the state, as much of the state was forested and populations may have been kept in check by red and gray wolves, once abundant in Indiana. According to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website on coyotes, "Today, coyotes are found throughout Indiana, including urban areas." Should we be concerned about coyotes?

Indiana DNR said the coyote resembles a small German Shepherd dog in size and build, but it carries its tail below the level of its back instead of curved upward. Their hair is grizzled gray or buff, with a reddish brown muzzle. The lower body is white, cream colored or reddish yellow. They average 25 pounds, ranging from 20 to 50 pounds. Coyotes will crossbreed with domestic and feral dogs. They communicate by barking, yipping and howling.

Coyotes are highly adaptable and occupy a wide range of habitats. They have developed a high tolerance for humans and are common in urban, suburban, and agricultural areas. These nocturnal animals are generally solitary and rarely form packs, but they will sometimes hunt with mates or family units.

Indiana DNR characterizes coyotes as opportunistic foragers that will consume anything of nutritional value. They typically feed on small animals, rabbits, and squirrels, but will not turn down meals offered from human-provided food sources, such as garbage. They may also eat fruit, insects, poultry, livestock, deer (especially fawns and road-killed deer), songbirds and game birds.

Brian MacGowan, Purdue Extension Wildlife Specialist, said that coyotes are probably one of the few animals that homeowners want removed simply by seeing them in their yard. "However, these fears are rarely justified," he said. "Diet studies of urban coyotes indicate they eat primarily rodents and rabbits."

Coyotes are extremely cautious of humans in areas where they are harassed, hunted or trapped. However, in suburban areas, where they have lost their fear of humans, coyotes may associate people and their pets with an easy and dependable source of food. Like other wild animals, coyotes that have lost their natural fear of humans are more likely to approach people and may threaten human health and safety. Coyotes can be carriers of rabies and other diseases that could threaten public health. Coyotes may also target pet cats and dogs.

Not all coyotes are stock killers, however some are killers of livestock and poultry. Generally only one or two in an area find livestock a favorite food source.

Coyotes kill large sheep, goats, and small calves by seizing the throat just behind the jaw and ear. Death usually results from suffocation and shock; blood loss is usually a secondary cause of death. They kill small animals such as young lambs, pigs, and kids (young goats) by biting the head, neck or back and causing massive bone and tissue damage. Blood and puncture wounds are typically evident on the head and throat. Coyotes normally begin feeding on the flanks or just behind the ribs, with some exceptions.

Contrasting this behavior with feral dogs, animals attacked or killed by dogs will generally exhibit indiscriminate mutilation, with damage occurring to several parts of the body. And, dogs generally do not feed on animals they have killed. Multiple kills are more common in the case of dog attacks.

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The one redeeming quality of coyotes is that they do perform a vital role in helping to control pests such as field rodents that can cause economic damage to crops and landscapes.

Livestock owners employ several techniques to defend against coyotes. These may include improved animal husbandry, fencing, predator-proof buildings, guard dogs, or mechanical repellent devices.

Suburban residents may limit problems with coyotes by not putting feed and water out for wildlife in general. Bird feeders should be constructed and positioned so that coyotes and their prey cannot reach them. Garbage containers should be firmly secured with tight fitting lids. Pets that are fed outside should not be fed in a way that leaves leftovers, and pet food should be stored inside. Allowing pets to run free increases their risk.

Indiana DNR said that landowners, or a person with written permission from a landowner, may take coyotes year-round on private property by trapping or shooting without a permit from the DNR. A landowner does not need a permit to take coyotes on his/her property by one of these methods, but a hunting or trapping license is required to hunt or trap coyotes on land other than your own.

Alternatively, nuisance coyotes can also be managed by a licensed wildlife control operator for a fee.

For more information, access the referenced Indiana DNR website on coyotes at:

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/5688.htm>. Additional information is available in an article by MacGowan on urban coyotes at: <https://www.purdue.edu/fnr/extension/blog/2017/03/15/urban-coyotes-should-you-be-concerned/>.