

# ANIMAL CONTROL

## Coyote Mythbusters



**True or False? If you see coyotes during the daylight hours, they must be sick or have rabies**

**FALSE!** Coyotes are mostly active at dawn and dusk, but they may be observed at any time of the day. Due to the highly adaptive characteristics of the coyote, this species has become increasingly common in urban and suburban areas. It is not unusual to see a coyote loping across residential backyards, slipping into an abandoned woodlot, or drinking from a roadside pool of water. Coyotes are here to stay, but as long as we understand the possible areas of contention and practice responsible methods of avoidance, it is possible for humans and coyotes to inhabit the same areas.

Coyotes are an important part of a health ecosystem. They do us a favor by controlling rodents and insects, and are nature's "clean-up service" removing carrion and preventing disease. But as we encroach on natural areas, coyotes are finding food sources that are not natural, and may bring them (and other wildlife) into unwelcome contact with people. The good news is there are proven long-term solutions for common concerns.

Coyotes are becoming habituated to people because they have been fed or encouraged to approach people, either purposefully or unintentionally. Over time and with enough positive reinforcement, habituated coyotes may become bolder. Reducing the risk of habituating coyotes to human contact is a process similar to reducing habituation in nearly all wildlife species. The following are some general practices to follow:

- Do not leave sources of food within reach of wildlife.
- Do not feed or intentionally approach wildlife.
- Do not encourage wildlife to approach you.
- Do not run away if you encounter wildlife, as this behavior encourages predators to give chase.

**True or False? Coyotes are not a significant predator of pets and deer.**

**TRUE!** While coyotes may occasionally take free roaming domestic animals and deer, diet studies show that in general rodents, rabbits, insects, fruit, and carrion make up the bulk of

their diet. Coyotes are opportunistic generalists and will eat almost anything. They will consume many types of vegetation, from grasses to seeds to fruits and berries. Reptiles, rodents, rabbits, white-tailed deer fawns, birds, insects, carrion, and many other types of small prey are on their menu. Although deer hair is frequently found in coyote scats, many incidences are the result of scavenging rather than predation. Coyotes may prey opportunistically on cats, small dogs, and occasionally on large dogs. However, the overall occurrence of pets in coyote diets is low to nonexistent.

**True or False? Statistically, coyotes are a significant threat to your safety.**

**FALSE!** Coyote attacks on people are very rare. Often, coyote attacks are preventable by modifying human behavior and educating people about ways to prevent habituation. In many human attack incidents, it turns out that the offending coyote was being fed by people. In many other instances, people were bitten while trying to rescue their free-roaming pet from a coyote attack. Less often, people are bitten by cornered coyotes, or even more rarely, rabid coyotes.

**Acting responsibly is always the key to safety. Follow some easy tips:**

- Do not feed coyotes.
- Walk pets on a leash.
- Secure garbage, compost and pet foods. Make sure can lids are on tight, feed pets inside, pick up fallen fruit and prevent bird feeders from attracting rodents.
- "Haze" coyotes near homes and community spaces. Hazing methods include – yelling, air horns, bells, shaker cans, banging pots and pans together, etc. Hazing is a method that deters an animal out of an area. Hazing can help maintain a coyote's fear of humans and deter them from backyards.
- Talk to your neighbors. See a coyote in your neighborhood? Ask your neighbors to remove attractants, haze coyotes and share these tips.

**Any other questions? Contact Michelle Santoro, Animal Control Officer for Bernards Township at 908-204-3066.**