

## Coyote Control In Alabama

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The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a native of the plains and mountainous areas of the western United States, but has become established throughout most of the eastern United States. The July 1929 edition of *Alabama Game and Fish News* reported coyotes being killed in Barbour, Autauga, and Marengo counties. Foxhunters brought coyotes into Alabama in the 1920's and 1930's. These introductions, coupled with a natural eastward expansion of their range, have established the coyote as a resident of Alabama.

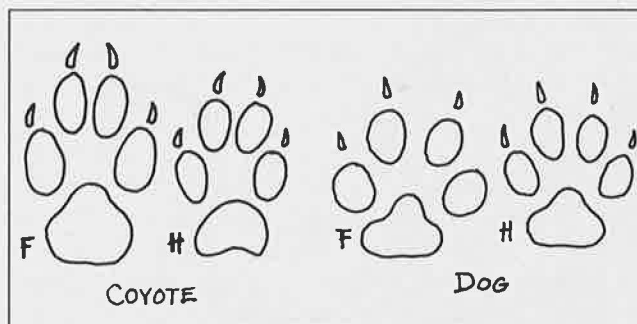
As the coyote population increases, the number of landowner complaints about coyote damage also increases. Some of this damage is done by coyotes, but free-ranging dogs may also be responsible. The bulk of the coyote's diet consists of rodents and rabbits. However, some coyotes kill and eat poultry, calves, goats, sheep, and other livestock. Coyotes will feed on what is available, and their diet changes seasonally. During the fall and winter months, when white-tailed deer fawns are abundant, coyotes' diet may contain a large proportion of deer. In addition to meat, coyotes will eat melons, corn, and other agricultural crops.

Coyotes breed in late winter, and usually four to six pups are born in the spring. Dens are normally in the ground, rock outcroppings, hollow trees, or brush piles. The male helps care for the young, and family groups remain closely associated through the fall.



Adult coyote.

Coyotes usually weigh from 23 to 40 pounds, mid-size between foxes and wolves. Their coat is a salt-and-pepper gray, with variations from lighter colors in some individuals to almost black in others. The ears are always erect. The tail, which may be black-tipped, usually hangs down. Coyote tracks are longer from front to rear than from side to side. By comparison, most dog tracks are more rounded. Also, nail imprints of the middle toes of the coyote tend to point toward each other rather than fan out like most dog tracks.



Coyote tracks, left, compared to dog tracks.

Evening and dawn are coyotes' two periods of greatest activity. They may reveal their presence at those times, especially in the evening, by a chorus of yipping and howling. The home range varies from 3 to 30 square miles, with the males' ranges usually larger than the females'.

Coyotes usually are intelligent, and the species has survived extensive control measures in some Western states. Each coyote is different. Most cause no significant damage and are not too difficult to catch. Some coyotes, however, may challenge your trapping ability and require extra precautions when handling and setting traps.

Points of view vary on dealing with coyote damage. Some people favor eradication, while others oppose any form of control. Experiences in Western states show that eradication is both impossible and impractical. Due to differences in topography, human

population densities, and public attitudes, many control techniques used in the West, such as aerial gunning and poisons, are not recommended for widespread use in the East.

The purpose of this circular is to assist individuals in minimizing or preventing coyote damage. These techniques are compatible with social considerations, wildlife management practices, and habitat conditions of Alabama. If you desire to begin coyote control, contact the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for information on appropriate restrictions, laws, and regulations.

### **Damage Prevention**

The adage about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure is applicable in almost any animal damage control situation. Coyote damage is no exception. Coyote damage can be minimized through a sound preventive program. Try to anticipate conditions and times when damage is likely, and use good husbandry or other preventive practices.

Unprotected poultry, sheep, goats, and newborn calves are particularly vulnerable to coyotes. Confine sheep and goats, particularly during lambing and kidding seasons and at night, to help prevent losses.

Move springer cows to barns or pens near lighted areas or human habitation to discourage coyote depredation on newborn calves and cows in labor. Remove dead livestock carcasses from production areas to prevent conditions that attract coyotes. However, once a serious damage problem has developed, livestock carcasses may be used to attract or concentrate coyote travel and aid in control.

Electric fences have been used successfully to exclude coyotes from livestock in the western United States. These same techniques should be effective in Alabama for reducing coyote damage to livestock and crops. A fence using high-tensile electric wire, strung to 300 pounds of tension, and charged by a 7,000-volt low-impedance charger, should stop most coyotes from entering an area. Wires should start 6 inches from the ground and be spaced every 6 inches to a height of about 5 feet.

Some livestock producers have used guard dogs to minimize coyote damage to livestock. These breeds of dogs do not serve to herd the stock, but are raised with the livestock. This social association causes the dog to aggressively defend the livestock from predators.

### **Shooting**

In Alabama, the incidental harvest of coyotes by hunters has increased steadily since the early 1970's. Deer hunters have killed most of these coyotes.

Predator-calling combined with shooting is another

technique for harvesting coyotes. This practice uses electronic or hand-held calls that sound like the distress cry of prey. These cries attract coyotes within shooting range. In Alabama, shooting is legal during daylight hours only.

### **Trapping**

Trapping is an effective method for controlling troublesome coyotes. Trapping season in Alabama is from November 20 to February 20. However, with the landowner's permission, coyotes may be trapped year-round on private lands. In Alabama, a No. 2 leghold trap is the largest legal landset. One advantage of leghold traps is that nontarget animals can usually be released unharmed. Traps with padded jaws may be best for some special situations. Coil spring traps have trigger mechanisms (pans) that can be adjusted to avoid catching nontarget animals, and these traps are more easily concealed than longspring traps.

### **Equipment Needed**

- A 4-foot by 4-foot plastic or other ground cover to keep human scent off the ground, reduce site disturbance, and hold excess soil for disposal when traps are being set.
- Clean rubber, leather, canvas, or plastic gloves for handling and setting traps.
- No. 2 coil spring traps with chains shortened to about 10 inches and modified with an end swivel. Some people prefer longspring traps with 6 feet of chain and a hook or other drag.
- Trap stakes of  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch steel reinforcing bar about 24 inches long for heavy clay soil, and about 36 inches long for sandy soils. Round or flatten stake tops so that they will hold a large washer. Insert stakes through the trap chain swivel so the washer retains the swivel, chain, and trap once the stake is driven into the ground.
- Digging tools.
- Dirt sifter with a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hardware cloth bottom.
- Odorless plastic or canvas trap pan covers stored in a small plastic bag until needed.
- Coyote urine and other lures.
- A large hammer or hatchet for driving stakes.
- A box, bucket, or packbasket to carry the supplies. The container should have an outside pouch to keep lures separated from other equipment.

### **Trap Preparation And Care**

Clean, odorless traps are more likely to give success. Coyotes have a highly developed sense of smell, and older individuals may smell the oil or other odors on traps and avoid being caught.

Pre-trapping preparations involve boiling traps for about an hour in water with red oak bark, walnut or pecan hulls, sumac berries, speckled alder bark, or logwood crystals to blacken and remove rust, odors, grease, and oil. Hang traps up to cool where they can be kept clean and dry.

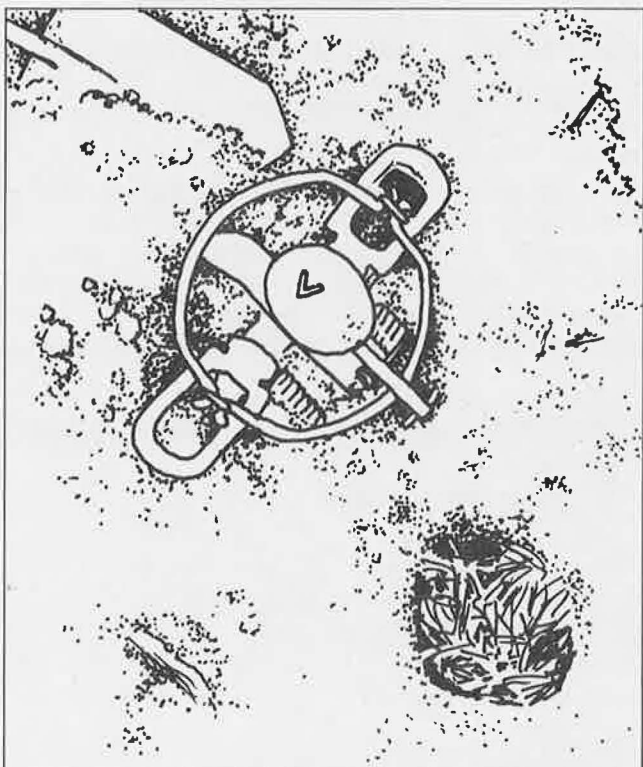
A thin layer of commercial trap wax or a mixture of 10 percent white beeswax and 90 percent canning paraffin helps preserve the traps and serves as a lubricant to speed trap action when sprung. A thin coating can be applied to traps by dipping them in a hot mixture of the wax. Heat the wax slowly to prevent a fire or explosion. Adjust triggers at this time to function at about 5 or more pounds of weight. Traps prepared in this way should function flawlessly.

Take care not to touch traps or let them come in contact with lure, bait, animal fat, or anything that would soil them with human or animal odors. Wash and air-dry the ground cloth frequently to avoid leaving odors on the ground near the trap.

### Sets

Three types of trap sets are commonly used with the coil spring trap to catch coyotes: dirt hole sets, scent post sets, and sets near travel routes. In all three sets, the techniques to stake, set, and conceal the trap are the same.

The dirt hole set is simply a hole about 1 to 5 inches in diameter, which simulates a site where another animal has buried food.



Dirt hole set.

The scent post set simulates a place where a coyote has marked a territory with urine. Suitable scent post objects to hold lures may be a bleached bone, tuft of grass, cow chip, chunk of wood, or other small natural objects that will attract coyotes' attention but not frighten them.

A set near a travel route is used to catch coyotes near frequently traveled paths, trails, field edges or corners, crossings, or trails leading to carcasses where coyotes have fed earlier.

Avoid daytime trapping next to old carcasses as you may catch nontarget species. Place traps 50 or more feet upwind of older carcasses. Make the sets late in the afternoon, and keep them covered during the day with a box, disk harrow blade, tub, or similar shield. Coyotes often return to feed on fresh kills and can be caught by placing one trap about 8 inches away from the portion being fed upon and another about 3 feet away. After 1 or 2 days, move the traps upwind about 50 feet.

### Sites

Select an area to set a trap by the presence of coyote signs such as actual sightings, tracks, scats, carcasses or remains, digs under net wire fences, or other indications of recent coyote activity.



Coyote scat.

Once you choose a general location, the prevailing wind direction and the type set (dirt hole, scent post, off trail, or other) are important in selecting a specific spot to place the trap. The spot should be related to other features so the odors from lures and scents will be swept downwind across an area that coyotes use frequently. This arrangement will attract the coyote to the set. Bare ground seems to work well, perhaps because it blends better with disturbed soil used to cover the trap.



Traps for dirt holes sets, scent post sets, and sets near fresh carcasses should be placed so that the edge of the trap is about 8 inches away from the edge of the hole, the object on which urine is placed, or the carcass being fed on. Do not use urine or lure on a set at a carcass. Both are recommended for sets upwind of a carcass.

### How To Make Sets

The first step in setting the trap is to put down the piece of canvas or plastic ground cover to work on. Then, wearing gloves and using a digging tool, dig a hole large and deep enough to conceal the trap with open jaws so the trap is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch below the adjoining soil surface. If the longspring trap with chain and drag are used, make the hole large enough to accommodate this equipment. Loosen additional dirt in the bottom of the hole to provide a soft base in which to bed the trap. Keep stones, clods, and other spoil on the plastic sheet and discard them when the set is completed.

Still wearing the rubber gloves, insert the stake through the trap chain swivel, and drive it flush to the ground at the edge of the hole where it does not interfere with the trap. Set the trap and bed it by pressing it firmly into the hole. Then, press dirt around the outside edges of the trap jaws.

Place a cover over the trigger pan and under the trap jaws, and add loose dirt to hold it in place. The cover keeps the space under the trigger pan from filling with dirt or sand that may prevent normal function. Cut a notch in the pan cover so the dog of the trigger is not restrained when the trap springs.

Sift fine soil, humus, sand, old sawdust, leaf mulch, or a mixture of these or similar materials over the trap to cover it about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. Using the digging tool, carefully smooth high places and remove grass, stones, and other small objects. The finished set should blend as well as possible with the surroundings.

A small amount of coyote bait (decayed meat chunks, fish oils, or prepared paste) is usually placed in the bottom of the hole of dirt hole sets. Fish oil or prepared paste on a small stick is used beside trail sets. Check with the State Conservation or Fish and Wildlife Agency about any restrictions on the use of baits or lures.

About 10 drops of coyote urine can be scattered to the right or left edge of the sifted soil on a dirt hole set, and about a tablespoon of urine can be applied to objects used in scent post sets.

Once the trapping equipment is replaced in its container, pick up the plastic ground cover by its corners and dump the debris well away from the set. Many trappers make combination sets about 20 feet apart and occasionally catch a coyote in each.

Check traps daily to service them and remove the catches. A restraining device made by attaching one end of a steel cable to the end of a 5-foot length of pipe and threading the other end through the pipe may help release nontarget catches. Coyotes can be killed by a shot in the head or lower chest from a .22 long rifle.

### Pelt Preparation

The value of coyote pelts taken during winter months can vary depending on demand and how carefully they are prepared for market. If you wish to prepare pelts for market, skin by making a cut up the back of each hind leg, around the anus, and along the bottom of the tail out to the tip. Remove the pelt, including the tail fur, carefully to avoid cutting holes in it. Remove excess flesh and fat from the skin using a fleshing tool and fleshing beam. Place the skin, skin-side-out, on a stretcher to dry overnight. Then, remove and turn it so the fur side is out, and replace on the stretcher until completely dry, which may take 5 to 10 days. Pelts can be sold separately or with other furs at auctions or to local fur buyers.

Traps, swivels, sifters, digging tools, gloves, lures, urine, logwood crystals, fur stretchers, and other trapping supplies can be purchased from local suppliers or ordered from national trapping supply houses.

### For Further Reading

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