



# Coyote

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## *Canis latrans*

The coyote is a species of canine found throughout North and Central America, ranging from Panama in the south, north through Mexico, the United States and Canada. It occurs as far north as Alaska and all but the northernmost portions of Canada. Coyotes were reportedly first introduced in Alabama around 1920 by fox hunters. The steady migration from western populations is likely the source of current populations. All natural predators of the coyote have been extirpated from Alabama. Lack of predation on the population and their ability to adapt to their environment has allowed the coyote to flourish in a wide range of habitats. They can be found throughout the state in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

### DESCRIPTION

Adult coyotes range in size from 20 to 50 pounds depending on the quality of habitat and gender (males are generally larger than females). They vary from a gray/salt-and-pepper color to an almost solid black. The throat and belly tend to be a lighter buff color.

Although often seen during daylight hours, coyotes are primarily nocturnal.

### REPRODUCTION

Adults form pair bonds and stake out territories that range from 3 to 30 square miles.

An average litter size is from four to eight pups. Both parents raise the pups,

which may remain with the family group or venture out on their own when they reach maturity in late fall. Coyotes may live solitarily, in pairs or in large family groups.

### DIET

The coyote is considered to be an opportunistic forager, meaning it will feed on anything of nutritional value. It will eat everything from fruits and vegetation to small rodents, insects and larger animals. Its diet varies throughout the year depending on availability and abundance. Coyotes aren't likely to pass up a free meal and can often be seen scavenging at garbage dumps and along roadsides. Their willingness and ability to forage on a wide range of food sources enable coyotes to thrive in a variety of habitats.

### INTERACTION WITH ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Coyotes are often blamed for declines in big game populations, specifically deer and turkey. While this may be true in some areas, habitat quality and game populations generally determine coyote populations. Healthy ecosystems that support exceptional game populations will also contain numerous coyotes. When ecosystems become overpopulated with certain wildlife species, coyotes can be beneficial by keeping their numbers in check.

The coyote is viewed by some as a nuisance species that is a potential threat to people and domestic animals. Coyotes typi-

cally avoid people, but there are some isolated instances where coyotes have attacked people and domestic animals. Most attacks by coyotes take place in suburban or urban areas where they live in close proximity to humans. These attacks are normally committed by coyotes that are starving, injured, diseased or threatened. Coyote removal may be the only solution at this point.

In Alabama there is no closed season on coyotes and no bag limit. Large scale coyote control is too expensive and time consuming to be feasible. Removal techniques such as trapping and shooting have little effect on their populations because other coyotes will reoccupy their territory. Mother Nature has provided coyotes with the ability to increase populations by reproducing more often and increasing total number of pups per litter. We must learn to live with coyotes, because their adaptability, elusiveness, and efficiency combine to make them impossible to eradicate. **DA**

## FACTS ABOUT COYOTE

- ▶ Coyotes shed once a year, beginning in May with light hair loss, ending in July after heavy shedding.
- ▶ A coyote's ears are proportionately large in relation to the head, while the feet are relatively small in relation to the rest of the body.
- ▶ Coyotes are presently the most abundant livestock predators in western North America, causing the majority of sheep, goat and cattle losses.