

COYOTE

The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a medium-sized, grey-brown dog with a pointed muzzle and large, pointed ears. It has slender legs and a long, bushy tail that is usually black-tipped. Coyotes are occasionally seen in daytime, standing in farm fields, or prowling amid the driftwood in the marshland beyond Richmond's dykes, but are most active near dawn and dusk. In evenings, near natural areas you may hear their howling or yipping calls, one group of coyotes responding to another, or to the barking of neighbourhood domestic dogs, or even joining in chorus with the sirens of passing emergency vehicles. Coyotes hunt, breed and thrive in Richmond, generally undetected by its human residents.

Coyotes are opportunistic omnivores, but their primary food is small rodents such as voles and mice, which they catch in overgrown fields and woodlots. Coyotes are often seen "mousing," staring downward and listening intently, suddenly leaping up and landing, front feet down, attempting to catch a meal. Other natural foods include slightly larger mammals such as squirrels and rabbits, amphibians, reptiles, birds and their eggs, fish and carrion. They will also eat grain, including seeds spilled from bird feeders, wild berries, and fruit from orchard trees, including that which has dropped to the ground. Coyotes also eat discarded human food, or food intended for pets that is left outside.

History and Habitat in Richmond

Until a few decades ago there were no coyotes in Richmond. Originally a wild dog of the central plains and deserts of North America, the range of coyote has expanded throughout the continent over the past century. This is due in part to wide scale clearing of forests, and the elimination of wolves, the main competitor and predator of coyotes, from farmland and urban centres. Coyotes appeared in the Lower Fraser Valley in 1930s. Over the past 25 years they have expanded into urban areas. They probably became established in Richmond in the 1980s.

Conflict with People

Food

Coyotes usually avoid people. However, on occasion there are conflicts, often having to do with food, either because of intentional feeding by people, or the presence of inadequately stored food or discarded food waste that attract coyotes. Once humans and their dwellings are associated with food, a coyote's natural caution may diminish, which can lead to confrontations. Coyotes are wild animals that will defend themselves if suddenly feeling surrounded or cornered.

Coyotes should never be fed intentionally. Under the B.C Wildlife Act it is an offense to feed "dangerous" wildlife, including coyotes, because feeding can lead to physical harm to people and inevitably the death of the wild animal.

Where coyotes live, which includes most of Richmond, garbage should be stored in sealed containers. Compost should not contain meat products. Grain spilled from bird feeders should not be allowed to accumulate, and ripening fruit should be picked from trees before or as it drops. Pet food should not be left outside overnight.



Pets

Coyote in field Domestic fowl, rabbits and small dogs or cats may also attract coyotes, which view them as potential prey. It is best to keep cats indoors, especially overnight. Coyotes are believed to play a significant role in the disappearances of domestic cats allowed to prowl, even in manicured suburban neighbourhoods far from woodlots or other natural areas. In or near areas where coyotes are regularly seen, small dogs should not be left unattended except in yards with tall, well-maintained fences. On forested or brushy trails where coyotes may lie in wait, it is best to use short leashes for small dogs. Chickens, rabbits and other small livestock should be kept in sturdy, coyote-proof pens.

In parks and on trails it is important to pick up after dogs (feces are an attractant). In no case should dogs, even large dogs, be permitted to interact with coyotes. What at first appears to be a friendly encounter may swiftly turn hostile, and may result in both dog and dog-owner being bitten.

Attacks on humans

Attacks on humans by coyotes are rare, and fatal attacks are almost unknown. A coyote is relatively small, between 9 and 18 kg (20-40 lbs), and thus little threat to an adult human, but may pose a risk to a small, unattended child. A 46-year study (1960-2006) across North America investigated 142 coyote attacks on people. Only six of these were in British Columbia. Of the 142 attacks, approximately half were believed to be predatory in nature, meaning the coyote perceived a human as prey. Humans involved were of all age groups, but slightly more than half of predatory attacks were against children, possibly because the playing behaviour of children, including running and other fast motions, is similar to actions typical of prey species.



What to do

In the rare event that you encounter an aggressive or unusually tame coyote, or if you are followed by a coyote, face it, make yourself large, loud and scary. Do not corner the animal – make sure it has the opportunity to flee. If you are with small children, pick them up. If you are with your dog, keep it close to you. Maintain eye contact with the coyote, use a low, strong voice, shout, wave your arms, flash open an umbrella, wave a walking stick or similar item to intimidate, throw rocks and, if available, bang metal objects together as you slowly back away. Do not turn your back and run. Running can trigger a chase response.

Rabies

Rabies is unknown in coyotes in B.C. Nevertheless, if bitten or scratched by a coyote it is best to seek medical advice.

Additional Information

To report aggressive coyote that does not show fear of humans, or to report someone feeding or intentionally attracting coyotes, or to report an injured coyote, call the B.C. Conservation Officer Service at 1-877-952-7277. Further Information from the B.C. Conservation Service on avoiding or dealing with encounters with coyotes is available online on their [website](#).

More tips from the BCSPCA on coexisting with urban coyotes can be [found here](#).

To learn more about Coyotes in the Greater Vancouver Area, visit the Stanley Park Ecological Society's website, [Coexisting with Coyotes](#).

