

Coyotes are perhaps the most misunderstood wild animal in the greater Chicago area. As Chicago's largest naturally occurring predator, coyotes are feared by many people. But is fear really necessary? What should you do if you see a coyote in your neighborhood?

Studies suggest that the best way to deal with coyotes is to coexist peacefully with them.



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Living with Coyotes



*Wildlife Rehabilitation and
Education
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Coyotes are perhaps the most misunderstood wild animal in the greater Chicago area. As Chicago's largest naturally occurring predator, coyotes are feared by many people. But is fear really necessary? What should you do if you see a coyote in your neighborhood?

The truth is that **coyotes are normally much more afraid of humans than we are of them**. Even in the most urban areas of Chicago, coyotes are our neighbors - living peacefully among us and usually without our knowledge. Perhaps we catch sight of a coyote running through our yard and then start worrying about its presence even though it's lived there for years without any problem.

Coyotes in the Chicago area typically weigh no more than 35-40 lbs. They eat berries, small mammals such as mice and cottontails, and they even help to control rat populations in the city.

There are some basic things you can do to ensure that you and your neighborhood coyotes live together without conflict. First and most importantly, **never feed coyotes**. If you feed a cat or dog outside, remove all food and clean up spilled food before dark. Secure all garbage cans to prevent unintentional feeding. Second, **practice responsible pet ownership**. Don't let pets outside unattended - especially at night. **Don't use retractable leashes** that allow your dog to wander a long distance from you during walks. As an extra precaution, **pick up your small dog if you see a coyote nearby**. Third, **don't approach coyote pups or a coyote den**. Coyotes may defend their young if threatened.

If you are approached by a coyote, it's likely that the coyote has become habituated due to direct or indirect feeding by humans. Face the coyote and be big and loud! Blow a whistle, shout and make noise. Do not run.

Should coyotes be trapped and relocated to a more rural setting or to someone else's neighborhood? The answer is no. Coyotes are protected by Illinois state law and, as such, it is illegal for members of the public to harm, trap or kill coyotes.* Further, coyotes can adjust litter size based on available food supply and population density with only the alpha male and female of a pack typically mating each year.

If a coyote is removed, lower coyote population density may increase the number of pups being born and other coyotes will also quickly move into its place. Additionally, relocated coyotes often try to return to their home territories and are usually killed in the process. As a result, removing coyotes via lethal or non-lethal methods is not considered to be an effective population management technique.

Coyotes' threat to humans is surprisingly low. A study that examined documented coyote attacks from 1985-2006 found no attacks on humans in Illinois**.

The study also determined that coyote attacks in other parts of the country and Canada were largely related to humans directly or indirectly feeding coyotes. The study contrasts the rarity of these documented coyote attacks with the frequency of dog bites. Cook County, for example, never had a coyote bite but had 3,043 cases of dogs biting humans in 2005 alone (*source: Cook County Animal Control*). Additionally, there was not a single documented case of rabies in a coyote in Illinois between 1990 - 2012, the years for which data is currently available (*source: Illinois Department of Public Health*).

So although coyotes are often feared and misunderstood, practical methods of avoiding human-coyote conflicts are considered preferable to removal. Learn to live with your wild coyote neighbors, never feed them or encourage them to approach humans and remember that coyotes serve an important role in controlling prey populations.

**exceptions: during hunting season for those possessing hunting permits and in accordance with Illinois law and for state-permitted nuisance removal services. Contact the IDNR for additional information.*

*** Coyote Attacks on Humans in the United States and Canada; White and Gehrt; 2009*

Photo © Vic Berardi

Lake County coyote thriving despite a leg amputation

Vic, Thank you for supporting our work!

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