



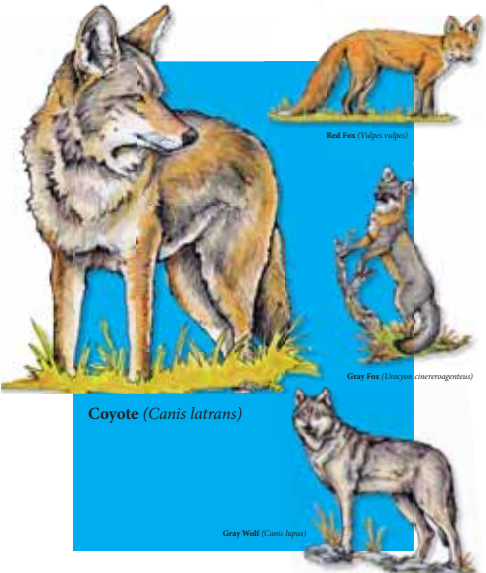
# Coyote Tales (Canis latrans)



## Coyotes are Dog Relatives

Coyotes look a lot like dogs and belong to the Family Canidae, or the dog family. In Michigan other members of this family include the Red Fox-*Vulpes vulpes*, the Gray Fox-*Urocyon cinereogregetus* and the Gray Wolf-*Canis lupus*. The coyote is medium-sized compared to its wild relatives, larger than foxes, but smaller than wolves.

All of these animals share similar characteristics, including a remarkable sense of smell, an elongated muzzle, long canine teeth and powerful jaws. These features are designed for hunting and killing prey, which makes them efficient predators. Long legs enable them to travel great distances over many types of terrain. Canines are intelligent and social in nature.



Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

## Comparing Coyotes to Dogs

At a distance, a coyote may appear to be a German Shepherd, but a closer look will show the difference. Distinguishing characteristics include:

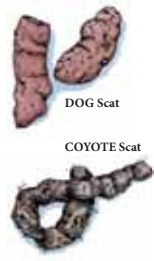
- Coyotes have striking yellow eyes with large black pupils. Most dogs have brown eyes.
- Coyotes possess thick underfur with bushy tails. Many dogs have little underfur.
- When running, coyotes hold their black tipped tails level.
- Coyote coats include many colors—varying from buffy-gray to yellowish-gray to reddish brown. Its back from the neck to the tail and along its shoulders has black-tipped guard hairs. Coyotes have cream-colored throats and bellies.
- Coyote ears are held erect and pointed, while most dogs have drooping ears.
- Adult coyotes weigh 25–50 pounds. Males are larger than females
- Coyotes are 43–53 inches long. The tail makes up about half its length.
- Coyote tracks look different than dog tracks: coyotes walk in a straight line—dogs do not. Coyotes walk with purpose. Dogs wander.



German Shepherd

Coyote Tracks and Trail

Dog Tracks and Trail



DOG Scat

COYOTE Scat



## Coyotes Are Adaptable

Coyotes are one of the most adaptable animals in North America. During the past 200 years, settlers brought livestock, cleared the forests and extirpated the Gray Wolf. Natural landscapes were replaced with pastures, farms, cities and suburbs. Wildlife management sought to eliminate predators like the coyote. Yet coyotes have survived despite being hunted and trapped. Coyotes are primarily active at night and go unnoticed most of the time. Coyotes are wary of people and tend to stay away from humans. They have a high reproductive rate and are able to live in many different habitats. All of these tactics have proven successful for coyote survival.

One key to the coyote's success is its amazingly diverse diet. Coyotes are really omnivores and will eat just about anything.

## COYOTE GRILL

On the Coyote's Menu:

- Birds
- Carrion/road kill
- Frogs
- Fruits and vegetables
- Garbage
- Grasshoppers/other insects
- Livestock
- Rabbits
- Rodents
- Snakes



• Present • 1880s

## Coyotes' Historical Range

Coyotes are now found throughout Michigan. However, they were not part of Michigan's past until recently. Changes in habitat and the wildlife communities since the European settlement of North America have favored coyotes. Historically, coyotes lived in the Great Plains. Today, they live throughout North America. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are more coyotes in the United States now than at the time the Constitution was signed.



## Coyotes in Neighborhoods

Coyote numbers are growing in Southeastern Michigan and incidents between people and coyotes are increasing. According to a report commissioned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, coyote nuisance calls in the Chicago area increased during the past 20 years. While coyotes have lived with people for hundreds of years, they were not found near cities until sprawl brought them into conflict with people. There are no definitive statistics on coyote population in Southeast Michigan, but researchers at Wayne State University are currently acquiring data on coyotes in southeastern Michigan. Contact: Bill Dodge, 313.577.8920 or Bill.Dodge@wayne.edu.

## A Year in the Life:

**December**  
Courtship begins; females choose a mate. Pairs bond and may remain together for years, but not necessarily for life.

**Late January–February**  
Coyotes breed/mate.



**April**  
Young are born in dens with four-seven pups per litter. Gestation is approximately 60 days. Pups are helpless for the first 35 days and depend on adults to survive.



**May–June**  
Pups venture out of the dens and begin to eat food regurgitated by adults.



**July–October**  
Parents care for young. Demand for food increases coyote activity, and may make them more visible to people.

**October**  
At six months, pups have teeth and are nearly full grown. Coyotes can be seen in family groups as mother coyotes train their young to search for food.

**November–December**  
Most young disperse to find their own territories. One or two pups may stay with parents if food is abundant.

## Saving Spaces for Predators



Overpopulations of deer have a negative impact on the land; natural areas have suffered from deer destroying plant communities. Predators like coyotes are essential to maintain healthy, balanced ecosystems. Coyotes prey upon deer as well as rodents, rabbits and other small mammals. Living with predators can be difficult for humans to accept, but understanding this important natural balance is one step towards sharing communities with predators like coyotes.

Photo courtesy of David Kenyon, MDNR

## Controlling Fear of Coyotes

Many people have never seen coyotes in their neighborhoods and the majority never will. Coyote sightings can create fear. Sensationalistic newspaper articles provoke public paranoia, leading people to think that coyotes are lurking everywhere.



Photo courtesy of Jim Ralley

Yet, scientists know that coyotes do not attack people and fewer than 1% of coyotes become nuisances.

Knowledge and an informed perspective can help humans co-exist with wildlife, including coyotes.



Photo courtesy of David Kenyon, MDNR

## Living with Coyotes

Coyotes are an integral part of the folklore and culture of the American West. Viewed by indigenous cultures as a teacher, the legendary coyote taught humans many life lessons. Recognizing its cunning nature, native people viewed the coyote as both powerful and magical.

What can society learn from coyotes today?

Keeping coyotes wild will keep them away from you and your property. Remember that coyotes are wild animals and are unpredictable.

Steps that you can take to reduce coyote conflicts:

1. Never feed coyotes.
2. DO NOT LEAVE DOG OR CAT FOOD OR WATER OUTSIDE OVERNIGHT.
3. Cover garbage.
4. Place bird feeders so they are not accessible to coyotes or other nuisance animals.
5. Never toss table scraps on the ground.
6. Keep small pets inside at night.
7. When walking dogs at sunrise or sunset, keep pets on a leash.
8. If you see a coyote around your home, shout, create noise and make a commotion to scare them away.
9. Arm yourself with knowledge, not fear.



## Park Education Connections

Oakland County Parks and Recreation provides programs and facilities to help guests learn more about sharing the parks with wildlife.

- Visit [DestinationOakland.com](http://DestinationOakland.com) to learn about natural resource management at parks for coyotes and links to other area conservation organizations
- Attend a program at a park facility to learn about wildlife
- Visit the Wint Nature Center to see wildlife in the area
- While hiking, keep dogs on a leash and follow park rules
- Look for animal signs. Try to find coyote tracks and scat.
- If you see a coyote at the park, observe it from a distance. Never approach a wild animal.
- Report aggressive, fearless or sick coyotes to park staff or contact Oakland County Animal Control: 248.391.4102.



Photo courtesy of David Kenyon, MDNR