

Coyote Fact Sheet

INTRODUCTION

Among the non-native wildlife found throughout the southeast, coyotes are unique in their ability to rapidly acclimate to a variety of habitats. With the extirpation of the red wolf in the last century across Georgia, the coyote (*Canis latrans*) has been able to fill a once occupied void and now can be found statewide.

BIOLOGY

Resembling a small dog in appearance, distinguishing characteristics of a coyote include pointy ears and snout, mottled color fur pattern ranging from black to reddish-blond and a bushy tail. As with most canines, coyotes are equipped with keen eyesight and an acute sense of smell to seek out their diet of small mammals, carrion and succulent vegetation. High pitched cries, shrieks or yips can be heard late in the evening as these animals communicate. Growling, barking and whining also are commonly used methods of communication. Breeding usually occurs in late winter to early spring with five to seven pups born in excavated dens or brush piles. Pups are weaned at about five to eight weeks of age. Socially, these creatures may mate for life and commonly can be found living within a small community (or pack) of related individuals. If mated with dogs, a female coyote can produce a coyote/dog hybrid called a "coydog." However, this is uncommon due to the unsynchronized breeding cycles of the two species.

HABITAT AND RANGE

The coyote's geographic range spans the entire North American continent from Alaska down to Central America. Ranging from the open grasslands and deserts of the west to the forests and agricultural fields of the east, the coyote can adapt and thrive wherever food, water and shelter can be found. Preferences include wooded forests bordered by fields and brushy areas to den and hunt for small mammals, which is similar to its native habitat range of the southwestern U.S. However, due to their ability to adapt, coyotes do not have many problems when exposed to habitat alterations. Coyotes have even been found frequenting urban areas in search of garbage, rodents and other easily found meals. For these reasons, coyotes are thriving in Georgia and their success is not the result of a Department of Natural Resources stocking program.

NUISANCE

Increased numbers of coyote sightings create increased concerns of landowners for their property and safety. However, by nature, coyotes tend to steer clear of potential danger. Contrary to popular belief, these animals do not hunt in packs but rather are primarily solitary hunters. Despite these characteristics, problems sometimes do occur as these predators become increasingly tolerant of human interactions.

Prevention is the best defense against nuisance coyotes. Small house pets (especially cats), young or small livestock and poultry are vulnerable and susceptible to predation by a coyote. If a coyote is suspected in an area where domestic animals are roaming free, several precautions can be made to ensure their safety:

- Take pets indoors during the night, as this is the coyote's primary hunting time.
- If the pet must be kept outside, put up fencing to discourage coyotes.
- Small livestock or poultry should be kept in an enclosed or sheltered area. Coyotes rarely bother larger livestock although they often are blamed for such nuisance instances. It should be noted that dogs, rather than coyotes, are notorious for harassing and attacking livestock.

Trapping and/or hunting are additional solutions against nuisance coyotes. Because coyotes are a non-native species in Georgia, there is no closed season for their harvest. Foot hold or live traps can be used to capture animals. However, coyotes may prove difficult to deceive with traps and hunting may be a better solution. When hunting, predator or animal-in-distress calls are effective methods of luring in a coyote. Coyotes are valued for their thick, attractive fur and are harvested seasonally for commercial use of their pelts.

More information on handling nuisance issues at georgiawildlife.com/nuisancewildlife.

DISEASE

A coyote displaying abnormal behavior and appearing fearless of humans is uncharacteristic and may mean the animal is injured or has fallen victim to a disease, such as rabies, parvovirus or distemper. In this case, it is in the coyote's and human's best interest to euthanize the animal to prevent any further spread of the disease and relieve the suffering of the infected animal.

BENEFITS

Despite its nuisance reputation, the coyote serves to maintain a balance in Georgia's rodent population.