

Coexisting with Coyotes



U.S. Fish and Wildlife

If you live in North Carolina, you've probably seen a coyote, or know someone who has.

The animal's unique ability to adapt to a wide range of habitats, including suburban environments, along with rapid human population growth across the state, has led to an increase in sightings. While in most cases coyotes are harmless, people can take steps to prevent conflicts with the animals.

Coyote Quick Facts

Where did coyotes come from?

Coyotes were once found only in the mid-western portion of North America. But as Europeans settled across the country, the subsequent landscape changes, coupled with elimination of wolves, allowed the coyote to expand its range toward the eastern United States. By the 1980s coyotes started to appear in western North Carolina as a result of natural range expansion from our neighboring states. Coyotes are now established in all 100 counties of North Carolina and live in many towns.



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What do coyotes look like?

Often described as a "mangy-looking dog," coyotes weigh about 20-45 pounds (similar to a mid-sized dog) with, typically, reddish to dark gray thick fur. They have long slender snouts, a bushy tail and pointed ears.

Do they make noise?

Yes, coyotes howl. While some find it unnerving, this howl serves many purposes, none of which are malicious. If you hear a family of coyotes howling, it is easy to think that the area is overflowing with coyotes. In reality, there are usually only 2-6 coyotes, including the pups.

Will coyotes attack me or my child?

Attacks on people, including children, are extremely rare. Normal coyote behavior is to be curious, but wary, when close to humans. Like other wildlife, they will become bold and habituated if people feed them, either purposely or inadvertently, such as with garbage or outdoor pet food. They rarely contract rabies.

Will coyotes attack my pet?

Possibly. Coyotes view outdoor cats and small unleashed dogs as prey, while larger dogs are viewed as threats to their territory and/or their pups. Coyotes are most likely to confront larger dogs during the mating and pup birthing period, January through June.

What should I do if I see a coyote?

Simply seeing a coyote is not cause for concern. If you see a coyote frequently, you and your neighbors should take steps to prevent conflicts with it and other wildlife.

Preventing Conflicts with Coyotes

To prevent problems with coyotes:

- **Secure garbage** in containers with tight-fitting lids, and take them out in the morning or pick up, not the night before. Coyotes and other wildlife will scavenge trash.
- **Don't feed or try to pet** coyotes. Feeding a coyote rewards it for coming in close proximity to people. Once a coyote becomes habituated, it loses its natural wariness of people and may become bold and aggressive.
- **Protect your pets by keeping them inside**, leashed, or inside a fenced area.
- **Install coyote-proof fencing** around your home to protect unsupervised pets.
- **Feed pets indoors** or remove food when your pet is finished eating outside. Coyotes and other wildlife are attracted to pet food left outdoors.
- **Keep bird-feeder areas clean.** Use bird feeders that keep seed off the ground. Coyotes are attracted to small animals congregating on the ground. If coyotes are frequently seen, remove all feeders.
- **Close off crawl spaces** under sheds and porches. Coyotes and other wildlife may use these spaces for resting and raising young.
- **Cut back brushy edges** in your yard, which provide cover for coyotes.
- Don't be intimidated by a coyote. Maintain its wariness by throwing a small object, such as a tennis ball, at it, making a loud noise or spraying it with a hose. Let it know it is unwelcome near your home.
- **Clear fallen fruit** from around fruit trees.
- **Educate your neighbors.** Your efforts to prevent coyote conflicts will be less effective if some neighbors are still providing foods.
- **Allow hunters or trappers** access to your property, so the local coyote population can be managed. Coyotes avoid areas in which threats are perceived.



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If you already have a problem with a coyote:

- **Implement the non-lethal steps** described above.
- **Contact a Wildlife Damage Control Agent**, a private individual who charges for his/her services. A list is available at www.ncwildlife.org under "Coexisting with Wildlife."
- **Contact a licensed trapper** during the regulated trapping season. See the list at www.ncwildlife.org under "Coexisting with Wildlife."
- **Coyotes can be hunted** year-round using firearms and archery equipment. However, check to see if local ordinances restrict the discharge of firearms. A landowner can shoot a coyote in the act of causing damage.



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