



# MANAGING COYOTE PROBLEMS



COUNTY OF  
LOS ANGELES  
ANIMAL CARE  
AND CONTROL

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are found throughout most of California. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates a population range of 250,000 to 750,000 animals. Coyotes are very adaptable and inhabit most areas of the state with the exception of the centers of major metropolitan areas. They are medium sized animals belonging to the dog family. Most adults weigh between 22 and 25 pounds on the average, with males being the larger sex. With large erect ears, slender muzzle and bushy tail, they resemble a small collie dog. In the hotter, drier regions of California, coyotes are tan-brown in color with streaks of gray. In the more mountainous or humid areas, the color is darker with less brown. In the winter, the coats become quite dense, especially in the colder areas. The voice of the coyote is quite distinctive, consisting of various howls, high-pitched yaps and occasional dog-like barks. Coyotes are proficient predators, possessing the speed, strength and endurance necessary to tackle prey as large as adult deer.



## BIOLOGY

In California, coyotes breed mainly during January, February and March. The gestation period is about 60-63 days. Young are born March through May, with litter sizes averaging 5-6 pups. Coyotes produce one litter per year. The young are weaned at 5-6 weeks and leave the parents at 6-9 months. Most adults breed first in their second year. Non-breeding, yearling coyotes often stay with the adult parents and help care for the pups. Coyote dens are found in steep banks, rock crevices, sinkholes and underbrush. Coyote dens are often holes that have been used by badgers, skunks, foxes or other animals with entrances enlarged to about one foot in diameter. Dens vary from 4-5 feet deep to 50 feet deep. The diet of the coyote consists mainly of mice, rats, ground squirrels, gophers, rabbits and carrion. They also eat insects, reptiles, amphibians, fruits, birds and their eggs, and deer fawns. In some rural areas of California, they prey heavily on sheep, cattle and poultry. In urban and suburban areas, garbage, domestic cats and dogs, other pets, hobby animals and pet food can be important food items. Coyotes are most active at

night and during the early morning and late evening hours. In areas where they are not disturbed by human activities, and during the cooler times of the year, they may be active throughout the day. Urban coyotes are becoming very tolerant of human activities. Young coyotes tend to be more active during daylight hours than adults.

## DAMAGE

Coyotes can cause substantial damage. In rural areas they oftentimes kill sheep, calves and poultry. In some parts of the state they cause damage to drip irrigation systems by biting holes in the pipe. In other areas they cause considerable damage to watermelons, citrus fruits and avocados. Aircraft safety is often jeopardized when coyotes take up residence on or near runways. Coyotes have also been known to prey on various endangered/threatened species including the San Joaquin kit fox and the California least tern. In urban and suburban areas, coyotes commonly take domestic house cats, small dogs, poultry and other domestic animals. Coyotes have been known to attack humans.

## DISEASE

Distemper and canine hepatitis are among the most common diseases of coyotes. Rabies and tularemia also occur and may be transmitted to humans and other animals. Coyotes often carry parasites, including mites, ticks, fleas, worms and flukes. Mites, which cause sarcoptic mange, are an important ectoparasite of coyotes. Heartworm is one of the most important endoparasites in California's coyote population. This parasite can be transmitted to domestic dogs by mosquitoes.