STANLEY PARK ECOLOGY

A Coyote Information Package for Parents and Schools

Stanley Park Ecology Society
610 Pipeline Rd,Vancouver, BC
604-257-6908
stanleyparkecology.ca
coyotes@stanleyparkecology.ca

Photo by Martin Passchier

Co-Existing with Coyotes
Parent/Teacher Kit

Although incidents between coyotes and children are extremely rare, it's important that parents, school staff, and children alike understand and are prepared for encounters with coyotes. This kit has been developed to provide parents, teachers, and school administrators with a better understanding of Vancouver's coyote population, advice on how to reduce conflict between people and coyotes, and information on how to prepare children in case of a coyote encounter.

The kit contains information on:

- Natural history and common questions about coyotes
- Coyote encounter advice
- Backyard attractants and blueprints for home-made coyote deterrents
- Schoolyard coyote attractants to avoid, and preparation plan in the event of an encounter.

The information in the kit allows parents and teachers to provide practical advice to students and school staff regarding coyote encounters and deterrents. It also helps to develop a clear understanding of what coyotes are and how urban environments support these adaptable creatures. A summary of Coyotes 101, a 45-minute school-wide multimedia auditorium program delivered by Co-Existing with Coyotes staff, is included in the kit as well. For more information or to arrange a presentation at your school, please contact the Stanley Park Ecology Society at 604-257-6908 ext. 104.

Sincerely,

Rose Wilkin
Urban Wildlife Programs Coordinator
Stanley Park Ecology Society
604-257-6908 ext. 104
urbanwildlife@stanleyparkecology.ca
www.stanleyparkecology.ca/co-exist

Coyotes 101 – An Auditorium Presentation

Coyotes 101 provides important coyoteinformation to a large audienceof children. The presentation enables students to identifya coyote, recognize urbancoyote attractants, and learn what to do when they see a coyote. The main messages are reinforced by classroom activities provided by CWC prior to and following the presentation.

Theme

Coyotes are intelligent mammals that are well adapted to living in close proximity to people, including in urban areas. Children and adults alike should be aware that coyotes live in their neighbourhoods and be prepared for a coyote encounter.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge:

- What to do when encountering a coyote
- Coyotes have adapted to human environments throughout North America
- Coyotes are highly social wild animals

Skills:

- Identifying a coyote
- Being prepared for a coyote encounter, use of coyote deterrents
- Recognizing and mitigating coyote attractants in cities

Attitude:

- Coyotes live in the city because the habitat supports them
- Coyotes are wild animals and part of our natural world
- Coyotes and people can coexist without conflict

Maximum audience: 250 students
Length: 30 minute presentation plus 15 minute Q&A
Cost: $305 for Vancouver, Burnaby, and Richmond schools. $355 for other cities.
Register Your School: Call 604-257-6908 ext. 104 or email urbanwildlife@stanleyparkecology.ca

Auditorium Presentation PLO Learning Outcomes

Primary:

- Describe the appearance and behaviour of coyotes.
- Determine what coyotes need to survive.
- Identify similarities and differences among coyotes and domestic dogs.
- Describe structures that enable animals to survive in different environments.

Intermediate:

- Relate the structure and behaviour of coyotes to their survival in local environments.
- Classify animals according to their internal and external features.
- Describe ways in which species interact with each other.

Coyote Facts

- Coyotes can be identified by their big ears pointing up, bushy tail pointing down, slim muzzle, white chin, and slender build (see photo below).
- Coyote fur can be many colours including grey, brown, red, black, and tan. Urban coyotes in Vancouver weigh 9 to 16 kg (20 – 35 lbs).
- Coyotes can reach speeds of 65 km/hr and trot comfortably at 30 km/hr.
- Urban coyotes are opportunistic omnivores, feeding mainly on rodents (rats, mice and squirrels) but also garbage, fruits, compost, fish, insects and more. Coyotes are native to the centre-west of North America and began to spread throughout North America following European settlement.
- There are 19 subspecies of coyotes ranging from Panama to Alaska.
- Coyotes from Eastern North America tend to be larger than western coyotes as they are said to have bred with wolves historically.
- Urban environments satisfy most criteria for ideal coyote habitat.
- Coyotes are not naturally nocturnal, but have adapted to come out mainly at night in cities to avoid people.
- Coyotes only use a den during the pup rearing season in the spring (April – July) Coyotes were first spotted in Vancouver in the late 1980's.

For more coyote facts please visit our website at www.stanleyparkecology.ca

Photo by Martin Passchier

Common Coyote Questions

What should I do if a coyote approaches me?

- Children and adults alike should be BIG, BRAVE, and LOUD
- BIG: Stand up tall, put arms over your head
- BRAVE: Stand your ground, don't run away, and be confident and assertive.
  - Throw rocks, sticks or objects towards the coyote (to scare, not hit)
- LOUD: Shout "Go away coyote!" in a deep, loud voice

What should I do if a coyote keeps approaching me?

- Do not turn away or run.
- Continue to exaggerate the above actions; be more aggressive
- Do not corner it or chase it if you suspect pups are nearby
- Keep constant eye contact with the coyote and continue to move towards other people, a building or an area of activity

I've seen coyotes moving through my yard a lot recently. Why?

Regular coyote presence in your backyard is a result of a nearby food source. The coyote may be finding a meal in your yard, or another yard in your neighbourhood. Whether intentional or not, someone in your neighbourhood is providing a food source for coyotes. Talk with your neighbours about recognizing and removing the following coyote attractants:

- Pet food stored or pets being fed outside.
- Unsecured garbage bins and compost.
- Fruit and berries fallen from trees or on the ground.
- Rodent habitat: Neglected sheds, garages, and yards
- (ex. maintaining bird feeders and fallen seed regularly)
- Outdoor cats

How can I discourage coyotes from visiting my backyard?

- React if you spot a coyote in your backyard. Coyotes are frightened by aggressive gestures, loud noises, and large forms.
- Choose a deterrent you are comfortable with; wave hockey sticks or brooms at them, throw stones, balls, or tins beside them, clang pots and pans in their direction, spray them with a garden hose, or use bear or dog spray.
- Eliminate any potential food sources; if there is a regular coyote food source in one yard on your block, there will be coyotes active throughout the neighbourhood.
- Work with your neighbours, don't stop at your property line!
- An indifferent attitude towards a coyote in your yard has a similar effect as feeding. Indifference towards coyotes in your backyard teaches them that they are accepted and welcome there.
- Build high fences (> 2 meters) which must be flush to the ground.

Feeding Coyotes is Against the Law

Feeding coyotes is a criminal offence in British Columbia. According to section 33.1 of the BC Wildlife Act, people feeding coyotes can face penalties ranging from a $345 ticket to a maximum $50,000 fine.

How can I prepare my child for potential coyote encounters?

- Teach them to identify a coyote by key features (big ears point up, bushy tail points down, no collar or leash)
- Tell them to be BIG, BRAVE, and LOUD in coyote encounters
- Have deterrents in several places around your yard
- Make a portable deterrent for your child if there are regular coyote sightings in your area
- Give them confidence by keeping the risk that coyotes pose in an accurate perspective. Coyote bite incidents are extremely rare, and coyotes do not eat people.

How can I keep my cat safe?

- Keep your cat indoors permanently
- Construct an outdoor pet run, or take your cat outdoors with a harness and leash
- The more time your cat is outdoors, the greater the risk it faces, not only from coyotes, but also from raccoons, cars, dogs, parasites, poisons, and diseases.

How can I keep my dog safe?

Medium and large dogs aren't typically at risk from coyote attacks; however, coyotes are curious and may approach. Small dogs on the other hand, coyotes may see as a food item. To keep your dog safe:

- Supervise it at all times if it is outside
- Make sure your pet is off leash in enclosed areas only
- Walk your dog (on leash) with a friend, in high pedestrian traffic areas and times
- Avoid long stretches of bushy paths and roads along abandoned properties
- If you notice a coyote approaching you when walking your small dog, pick it up if possible or keep it close and move towards an active area
- If your dog (of any size) is off leash, ensure your dog has immediate recall response
- Never encourage or allow your dog to interact or 'play' with coyotes
- Prepare and take a deterrent (coyote shaker, stick, rocks, dog spray, etc) with you on your walk

Reducing Schoolyard Coyote Attractants

Urban areas are ideal for a coyote's native habitat. Coyotes live in our neighbourhoods because our environment is as convenient and suitable for coyotes as it is for people. For this reason, coyotes often visit parks, playgrounds and schoolyards within our communities.

Some coyote attractants can be minimized by simple preventative measures. Others can only be dealt with by informing school staff and students about the reasons why coyotes are in the neighbourhood, and preparing them for coyote encounters.

Why do coyotes visit schoolyards?

Food

Litter: Food waste and wrappers are commonly visible near and around schools and playgrounds. These not only provide a direct meal for coyotes, but support the rodent population, which is the main component of the urban coyote diet.

- Action: Initiate a school garbage patrol. A small group of responsible older students spend the first 10 minutes after lunch, with an adult lunch supervisor or teacher, collecting food and rubbish left on the school ground.

Outdoor Garbage: If the schoolyard (or neighbouring) garbage bins are open topped or if large dumpsters are left open overnight, a whole ecosystem is being attracted to the school. Small rodents like mice and rats attract larger predators like raccoons and coyotes.

- Action: Empty all outdoor garbage bins before nightfall daily. Consider requesting the school invest in sealed garbage cans, or at least with hinged lids. Ensure large dumpsters are kept closed overnight.

Rat Habitat: Urban areas support rat and mouse populations by providing rubbish for food and nesting sites in buildings and yards. Rats nest year-round and will make homes in locations they find warm, close to a food source, and safe. At schools, these can be in basements, boiler rooms, crawl spaces, storage spaces or under porches, stairways and portable classrooms.

- Action: Monitor and react to areas of rat and mouse activity. Avoid the use of poisons to control rodents as they often find their way into pets and other animals.

Location

Neighbours: Urban schools have a wide variety of neighbours. Some schools back on to green spaces like regional parks, golf courses or ravines. Others have housing complexes, shopping facilities or industrial or commercial ventures as neighbours.

- Action: Contact your neighbours (business operators, Park Board, house owners) regarding the importance of a neighbourhood effort in deterring coyotes and the sharing of information. Private residences and housing complexes can help by not feeding pets outside, securing compost and garbage bins, maintaining their property and collecting any fallen fruit from yard trees. Commercial and industrial neighbours can help by the proper disposal and storage of their garbage, and rodent population monitoring.

Extended periods of quiet: Despite the perception of schoolyards as noisy and active places, for long periods of time they are quiet and have little activity. Schoolyards are busy immediately before and after the school day, as well as during lunch hours and recess. After dark, the grounds are usually deserted. Schoolyards are far less active on weekends and school holidays as well. These consistent periods of relative quiet are attractive for coyotes to visit.

- Action: There is no real direct action to this problem. Crime deterring motion lights may have some effect on coyotes' nocturnal visits. School engineering and maintenance staff on site during non-school hours should be adept and comfortable using coyote deterrents to frighten coyotes off the property.

General Action

The best method of reducing the potential for conflict between children and coyotes is through education. Provide schoolchildren with an understanding of coyotes, what they are, how the urban lifestyle supports them, and what to do if they encounter a coyote, not only at or en route to school, but under all circumstances.

Coyote Encounter Preparation

The most effective methodof reducing conflicts between coyotes and children is preparation. The schoolyard should be prepared by removing or limitingcoyote attractants, and students and staff should be prepared for encounters with coyotes. If there are regular coyote sightings near or on school property, children need to know:

1. **What to do if they encounter a coyote:** ways to safely end encounters with a coyote
2. **The urban coyote lifestyle:** how coyotes live and are supported by habitat in the city
3. **Coyote natural history:** how to identify a coyote and respect their wild nature

One of the greatest threats to a child when in the presence of danger is their own panic. A child's fear of how they perceive or imagine coyotes can diminish when they understand coyotes better and are prepared.

Making the Plan:

1. Sketch a layout of the school property.
2. Mark coyote attractants and access points on the map.
3. Select and mark specific areas on school grounds to serve as coyote encounter "destinations".

Target destinations would serve as an area that children could move towards in the event that they encounter a coyote. The areas should be active, highly visible, and have multiple paths leading towards them. "Destinations" should be visible and accessible from areas in which coyote encounters are most likely to occur. They would also allow for immediate access to a school building during school hours.

4. Ensure children, teacher, and othr school staff and volunteers are familiar with the following coyote encounter behaviour for situations both on and off school property:

- Appear as aggressive as possible.
- Throw any available objects towards the coyote.
- Shout at the coyote in a loud deep voice.
- Maintain eye contact with the coyote.
- Move towards an active area.

Report any aggressive coyotes to the Ministry of Environment at 1-877-952-7277

Home-made Coyote Deterrents

The following home-made deterrents are simple ideas that have proven effective in frightening coyotes. Coyotes have also been scared off properties by:

- shouting in a deep and loud voice while displaying aggressive behaviour.
- waving brooms and hockey sticks.
- throwing baskets, tennis balls, and other objects.
- clanging pots, pans and metal garbage lids.
- spraying vinegar in a super soaker.
- using dog and bear spray.

The Coyote Shaker

The coyote shaker has worked well for older children. By having a physical object on which to focus, children are less likely to panic and more likely to act in an effective manner. The main reason these objects have frightened coyotes is the aggressive behaviour in which they are used. Remember that individual coyotes have had different experiences. A coyote which has been regularly eating apples in a backyard for a month will react differently than a coyote in a yard for the first time. If a coyote does not respond to the deterrents, the actions should be continued and exaggerated. Do not run from coyotes.

Materials

- Pop can
- a spoonful of gravel or pebbles
- aluminum foil
- ducttape, packing tape, or a rubber band

Intructions:

1. Place the rocks in the can
2. Cover the opening with tape
3. Cut a piece of foil and tape it around the can or secure it with a rubber band

Using the Shaker:

Shake the tin aggressively at the coyote using your arm's full motion while shouting in a deep, loud voice. The shaker scares the approaching coyote through aggressive hand motions and loud noises.

It is important for children to be comfortable using the deterrent. If there are regular coyote sightings around the schoolyard, rehearse encounter behaviour in class until each child is prepared to use a deterrent. Different children and adults are comfortable using different deterrents. Encourage the use of the deterrent most comfortable for each person.

Co-existing with Coyotes PAC Input

1. What mediums do you consider most effective in educating children about coyotes?

- ☐ classroom presentations
- ☐ community environmental fairs
- ☐ website / phone line
- ☐ discussions with parents
- ☐ other - please list

2. What mediums do you consider most effective in educating adults about coyotes?

- ☐ community environmental fairs
- ☐ website / phone line
- ☐ public forums
- ☐ brochures / newspaper articles
- ☐ organization / club / group presentations
- ☐ other - please list

3. Prioritize the following education themes and messages:

- ☐ how to react when face to face with a coyote
- ☐ methods of deterring coyotes from backyards
- ☐ don't feed wildlife
- ☐ pet manners / habits
- ☐ recognizing coyotes / understanding coyote natural history

4. Prioritize the following audiences in the order you believe deserving of program emphasis:

- ☐ elementary and secondary schools
- ☐ open public forums
- ☐ community organizations and groups
- ☐ other - please list

5. What are your measures of success for Co-Existing with Coyotes?

- ☐ reduction in number of coyote and human conflicts
- ☐ reduction in the number of coyote complaints to frontline organizations
- ☐ number of people informed by contact with Co-Existing with Coyotes
- ☐ other - please be specific

6. What limitations or challenges do you see with Co-Existing with Coyotes?

7. Please add any additional comments, suggestions or critiques by email or on the reverse of this page.

Please e-mail your input to urbanwildlife@stanleyparkecology.ca