



Coyote

Taking a Closer Look at Coyote!

By Merrill Tawse

We get phone calls periodically where the caller on the other end is somewhat anxious or frightened. They desperately want to know if there is a danger to them or their pets because they “just saw a coyote nearby”. The wild vicious characteristics that have been conveyed from literature, and some carry over from their relative the wolf conjure up these feelings. Sometimes it takes some doing to set the caller at ease with reassurances that they have nothing to fear.

Historically the Coyote, *Canis latrans*, was found in the open areas of the west but as Europeans settled and cleared the woods of the eastern half of North America they expanded their range all the way to the Atlantic Coast. These forested areas had previously been the strong hold of the Timber Wolf (Gray Wolf). We have had Coyotes in Richland County for many years. They quietly come and go without people encountering them. Here in the east they do not call at night out like they do out west.

Coyotes are secretive, they have large territories and low population densities. Your chance of catching a glimpse is based on being at the right place at the right time. Most sighting reports we get are from the open valleys between Bellville and Butler, as well as open stretches to the west of the Nature Center along Lexington Springmill Road. More often people know of they are present because of the scats (droppings) they leave behind to mark their territory.

I frequently see coyote scats on the Bike Trail especially near Wade and Gatton Nursery and also near the marsh off Home Road. The boardwalk of Fowler's Woods will usually have a scat or two on it. Their scats can be told from foxes and feral dogs by the larger size, about the thickness and length of a bratwurst. They can be distinguished from large domestic dogs by observing what it is made of, in the case of a pet dog it will look like "dog food". The Coyote scat will have a lot of hair and some bone chips in it.

When food becomes scarce they have been known to show up on people's porches to feed on old dog food. Analysis of stomach contents have shown that most of their food is mice and small rabbits. The claims that they are feeding on animals the size of turkey, domestic pets, livestock, or deer is not true. The killing something as large as these puts the coyote at too great of a risk of getting injured. In the winter when it is cold enough to prevent spoilage they will feed on road killed deer. A find such as this can last them for a week or so.

An animal of open brushy areas at night they can roam great distances on a hunt. Don Long of Bellville area has radio-tracked Coyotes here in Richland County. He has found that at night the males might travel a loop of 10 –15 miles north and south and about three to five miles east and west. Females who do not wander as much the loop is closer to five miles. On radio-tagged animal went from near the Knox and Richland County line to up behind Meijers store within a couple of hours. According to Don when people see them out during the day it is probably because someone or something has scared them up from their day retreat.

When seen in the wild they are similar in size to a German Shepard. Their legs are a little longer and they tend to hold their tail out straight behind or between their legs and not up like many domestic dogs. Adult males average 35 to 40 and females 25 to 35 pounds. She will raise her pups in a den, which is often an enlarged ground hog den. The pups are born in late March to early April and will stay with her until mid-summer.

I remember thirty years ago people claiming that most if not all the coyotes in Ohio were actually a cross with the feral dogs and called coy-dogs. Recently the state with DNA analysis checked 11 road killed coyotes from throughout Ohio and not a single one was a cross. So the claim of cross breeding and that this would lead to them greatly increasing in numbers is false.

Coyotes are not an animal to fear but rather to be impressed because of their adaptive abilities. In this day and age where far to many animals are loosing the fight to survive it is nice to see one who is succeeding. In our north room with the animals we have too loose animal furs. The smaller one is from a Gray Fox but the larger one, and note how large it is, is from a coyote. It is one that was trapped in Richland County and the trapper tried their hand at tanning it. Well they were not as successful as they wanted (it is a little greenish-blue in color) so they donated it to us.