



## The Urban Coyote

### Found Throughout Orange County

Serving the cities of Mission Viejo, Laguna Niguel,  
Aliso Viejo, Laguna Hills and Rancho Santa Margarita



We recognize that urban wildlife in Orange County is an important part of our environment. As the human population increases in our area, so will the chances of encounters between man and the various species of wildlife which are native to our region. People usually fear what they don't understand; while a roaming stray dog in a given neighborhood may not raise eyebrows, a wandering coyote almost certain will cause alarm.

Generally, coyotes are reclusive animals who avoid human contact. Coyotes who have adapted to urban and suburban environments, however, may realize there are few real threats and approach people or feel safe visiting yards even when people are present. These coyotes have become habituated (lost their fear of humans). Likely due to the ready availability of food in our neighborhoods. Sometimes this food is deliberately provided by people who like to watch wild animals or misguidedly feel they are helping them by feeding them. These bold coyotes should not be tolerated or enticed, but given the message that they should not be so brazen.

**Hazing** is a method that makes use of deterrents to move an animal out of an area or discourage an undesirable behavior or activity. Hazing can help maintain a coyote's fear of humans and deter them from neighborhood spaces such as backyards and play spaces. The following guidelines are adapted from the Denver, Colorado coyote problem mitigating program's Hazing Guidelines, written by the Natural Areas Program of the Denver Parks and Recreation Department in October 2009. These guidelines have proven very successful at correcting problematic coyote behavior both short and long term.

Using a variety of different hazing tools is critical; coyotes can habituate to individual items, sounds and actions.

#### **Methods of Hazing Include:**

- Yelling and waving your arms while approaching the coyote
- Noisemakers: voice, whistles, air horns, bells, soda cans filled with pennies or dead batteries, pots and pan banged together
  - Projectiles: sticks, small rocks, cans, tennis balls, rubbers balls,
- Others: hoses, water guns or spray bottles with vinegar water, pepper spray, bear repellent, walking sticks

The simplest method of hazing a coyote involves being **LOUD** and **LARGE**. Stand tall, wave your arms and yell at the coyote, approaching if necessary, until it runs away. If a coyote has not been hazed before, he may not immediately run away when you yell at him. If this happens, you may need to walk towards the coyote and increase the intensity of your hazing. The coyote may run away, but then stop after a distance and look at you. It is important to continue to haze the coyote until he completely leaves the area. You may need to use different tactics, such as noisemakers, stomping your feet, or spraying the coyote with a hose, to get him to leave. After you have successfully hazed a coyote, he or she may return again. Continue to haze the coyote as you did before; it usually takes only one or two times to haze a coyote away for good.

#### **Tips for Success**

- Keep pet food inside; this is one of the biggest reasons coyotes frequent backyard
- Do not leave small pets unattended in your front yard
- If you encounter a coyote in your yard, use the tips above
- Never run away from a coyote
- Coyotes are skittish by nature and as a rule do not act aggressively towards people. However, engaging animals that are sick or injured can result in unpredictable behavior. If you suspect a coyote is sick or injured, contact us **IMMEDIATELY**. Do not interact with the coyote.



## Dog-walking Tools

There are several tools that you can carry with you while walking your dog that can be used to repel coyotes. *Always walk your dog on a leash. We highly recommend that you do not use retractable leashes.* These include:

- Whistle or small air horn (you can purchase small air horn “necklaces”)
- Squirt guns or pepper spray
- Pick up sticks or rocks and throw them towards the coyote

## Keeping Coyotes Out Of Your Yard



Coyotes generally avoid humans, even when their home range encompasses largely urban or suburban habitat. However, the presence of a free buffet in the form of pet food, compost or trash can lure coyotes into yards and create the impression that these places are bountiful feeding areas. Without the lure of food or other attractants, their visits will be brief and rare. But a coyote who finds food in one yard may learn to search for food in others.

### Here are some general rules to follow:

- Avoid feeding pets outside. If you must, feed them only for a set time during the day (no more than one hour) and remove the food bowl as soon as your pet has finished their meal.
- In dry conditions, water can be as alluring as food, so remove water bowls set outside for pets and make watering cans unavailable.
- If you compost, use enclosed bins and never compost meat or fish scraps.
- Remove fallen fruit from the ground
- Keep trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids. Only place the cans curbside the morning of collection. If you leave out overnight, they are more likely to be tipped and broken into.
- Clear brush, large rocks and wood piles far away from your yard.

## Free-roaming pets

Free-roaming pets, especially cats and small dogs, attract coyotes into certain neighborhoods. Since coyotes tend to be out at all hours of the day, the best way to minimize risk to pets is not to leave them out unattended at any time. Don't allow your cat to roam freely. Ideally, cats should be kept indoors regardless of whether there is a coyote in the area or not, to keep cats safe and healthy as well as to keep them from killing birds or other wildlife.

## Shelter

Coyotes are secretive animals and studies have shown that they can live for a long time in close proximity to dense human settlements without ever being noticed. Such coyotes are abiding by the rules we set for minimal conflicts, and should be left alone. In the spring, when coyotes give birth and begin to raise litters, they concentrate their activities around dens or burrows in which the young are sheltered. At these times, they may become highly defensive and territorial, and challenge any other coyote or dog that comes close to the pups. People walking their dogs in parks and wooded areas may run into these situations and even be challenged by parent coyotes to back off. Fights rarely occur, and most often when dogs are off leash. It's important to recognize such incidents for what they are: defense of space, not random attacks. If you encounter a coyote when walking your pet, do NOT run away; haze the coyote with the Hazing Guideline techniques.

## Risks To Dogs

Dogs, especially small dogs, are also vulnerable to coyote confrontations. These incidents generally involve coyotes who are either accustomed (habituated) to people or coyotes who are protecting their territory and pups, which usually occurs during breeding season. It is important to never let your dog interact or play with a coyote. Although attacks on larger dogs are rare, coyotes will sometimes go after a large dog when they feel that their territory is threatened. This generally occurs during the coyote breeding season, which takes place from January through March. During this time, it is especially important not to leave dogs outside unattended and to keep them on leashes when in public areas. To further protect cats and dogs, fencing can be extended underground at least 12 inches and include an L-shaped mesh apron extending outward at least 18 inches and secured with landscaping staples to keep coyotes from digging under. Devices, such as the “coyote roller” ([www.coyoteroller.com](http://www.coyoteroller.com)), roll off coyotes that try to scramble over the fence and can enhance the effectiveness of a fence. Do-It-Yourself options include adding PVC piping or chicken wire to the top of your fence to prevent coyotes from jumping over.

## Why Killing Does Not Reduce Coyote Population

It is extremely difficult to ensure that the problem-causing coyote(s) will be the one(s) located and killed. Coyotes removed from an area will quickly be replaced by others. Coyote pairs hold territories, which leaves single coyotes (“floaters”) constantly looking for new places to call home. If attractants in a neighborhood are not removed, new coyotes in an area can quickly become “nuisance” coyotes.

## It won't reduce coyote populations

Research suggests that when aggressively controlled, coyotes can increase their reproductive rate by breeding at an earlier age, having larger litters, and a higher survival rate among young. This allows coyote populations to quickly bounce back, even when as much as 70% of their numbers are removed. It is nearly impossible to completely eradicate coyotes from an area. Despite bounties and large-scale efforts to kill coyotes over the last 100 years, coyotes have in fact expanded their range throughout the U.S. and Canada tremendously. One study even found that killing 75% of a coyote population every year for 50 years would still not exterminate the population.



## Why Trapping Is Inhumane

The most common devices used to capture coyotes are leg hold traps and neck snares. Both can cause severe injuries, pain, and suffering. Pets become unintended victims of traps set for coyotes. An informal search of media reports suggests thousands of unintended incidents have occurred, causing heartbreak for the families affected.

Non-target wildlife is also caught—and many sustain injuries so severe that they die or must be killed.

## What Does Work?

A program combining **Education** and **Hazing** offers the best method for handling and preventing conflicts with coyotes, and is working already in a number of communities. By “educating” our resident coyotes, you will be leaving territory holders in place who know and abide by the “rules” of living close to people. Coyotes are here to stay, it’s up to us to find ways of coexisting with them.