

WHAT TO DO ABOUT



Coyotes and Foxes



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

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RELEVANT NATURAL HISTORY

Both coyotes and foxes are members of the *canid* family. Coyotes look similar to medium-sized dogs and are often confused with German Shepherds. Foxes are slightly smaller. There are five species of foxes in North America, but only two—the red and the gray—are found in urban settings. The most accurate way to tell a red fox from a gray fox is by looking at the tail: red foxes have a white tip at the end of their tail; gray foxes do not.

Contrary to popular myth, coyotes and foxes are not looking to attack people and drag off their children. They seek out small easy prey like mice, chipmunks, shrews, rabbits and squirrels, as well as human-produced food such as garbage or outdoor pet food. They are adaptable opportunists who don't mind living close to people in suburban and urban settings, their presence often going unnoticed. However, people may be surprised to see a coyote or fox in their backyard—and that surprise often leads to unnecessary panic.

WHAT TO TELL CALLERS

Daytime Sighting of Coyote or Fox

ADVICE: It is perfectly natural behavior for a coyote or fox to be outside during the day, especially during the spring and summer when they are busy hunting rodents to feed their young. Just seeing a fox or coyote during the day doesn't mean the animal is rabid, aggressive or dangerous.

Brazen Coyote or Fox

ADVICE: Coyotes and foxes may lose their natural fear of people when they find free sources of human-associated food (e.g. pet food left on porches) in neighborhoods and have repeated contact with people with no negative consequences. You can teach an overly bold coyote or fox to be wary of people by using negative conditioning or "hazing." To do that, be big and scary: raise your arms over your head and yell or blow a whistle, bang metal pot tops together as you move towards the animal or spray the animal's hindquarters with a hose or water gun. Hazing works best if you keep the negative reinforcement going until you run the animal off the property.

Keeping Coyotes/Foxes Out of Yards

ADVICE: You can prevent coyotes and foxes from visiting your yard by taking a few precautions: do not leave pets outside unattended; do not leave pet food outside; keep garbage in a secure container and only put it outside on the morning of pick-up; do not put any meat scraps in compost heaps; pick up fallen fruit from underneath trees; and cut back brush around your property that might provide cover for coyotes or their prey.

Coyotes can easily get over fences six feet tall or shorter. For fences at least six feet tall, the *Coyote Roller* (available from Roll Guard, 619-977-6031 or coyoteroller.com) is an effective device for keeping dogs in and coyotes out. The *Coyote Roller* is a free-standing cylinder that attaches to the top of a fence and literally "rolls" any animal off who is attempting to climb over.

Fear of Family Being Attacked

ADVICE: Coyote and fox attacks on people are extremely rare—and that is why they are highly publicized the few times they do happen. Neither the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nor any other health authority has classified coyotes or foxes as a human safety risk.

Most, if not all, of the few cases of coyotes biting humans that occur nationally each year are directly related to coyotes being fed by humans, whether intentionally or not. Take proactive measures to ensure there's no food, such as garbage or pet food, on your property to entice animals and use hazing techniques to scare away any overly bold coyotes or foxes.

ACTIONABLE: If the caller, a family member or pet are actually bitten by a coyote or fox, tell them to contact their local animal control officer immediately. Tell the caller to wash the wound with soap and water (wear gloves if handling a potentially bitten pet) and to contact the local health department and their own doctor (or veterinarian) for guidance. Gather as much information about the incident as possible (such as what the person was doing prior to the incident, whether or not feeding or pets were involved, etc.).

Possibly Rabid Fox or Coyote

ADVICE: A daytime sighting alone does not indicate rabies. Foxes and coyotes are normally active by day and rabies is fairly rare in these animals.

ACTIONABLE: The ACO should only be contacted if the coyote or fox is acting sick or showing abnormal behaviors that might indicate rabies, such as partial paralysis, circling, staggering as if drunk or disoriented, self-mutilating, or exhibiting unprovoked aggression or unnatural tameness. Advise callers to keep their family and pets inside while waiting for help.

Fox or Coyote with Mange

Foxes or coyotes who scratch a lot, seem disorientated or weak and who have missing fur (or are completely bald) are afflicted with mange, which is an ailment caused by tiny mites under the skin. Foxes or coyotes with mange may be seen "languishing in yards" or taking advantage of pet food left outside because they are too weak to hunt.

REFERRAL: Refer to a wildlife rehabilitator or **ACTIONABLE** by contacting the ACO if the fox/coyote is acting sick or approaching people.

Attacks on Domestic Pets

ADVICE: People often worry that their outdoor cat will be attacked by a fox. They don't realize that foxes only weigh 10-15 pounds and are too small to take on an adult cat. Smaller pets (such as kittens, rabbits, chickens or guinea pigs) left outside could be at risk, though, and should either be kept indoors or in secure enclosures outside. It is perfectly normal behavior for coyotes to prey on outdoor cats, which is why it is so important for people to keep cats indoors. Small dogs left outside unattended are also at risk of coyote attacks, especially in the spring and summer when coyotes are hunting to feed their pups. To protect pets, instruct people never to let their pets outside unattended and to keep pet food inside. During the winter months (coyote breeding season), it's also important to keep large dogs on a leash as coyotes may view large off-leash dogs as a threat to their mates.

Foxes and Chicken Coops

ADVICE: The only effective way to protect your chickens is to reinforce the coop so coyotes and foxes can't get in. 16-gauge or better welded wire with 1 inch by 1 inch openings should be installed to keep them out. Although reinforcing a pen may be a temporary inconvenience, once an animal pen is wildlife proofed, the problem is solved.

Fox Kits or Coyote Pups Playing in the Yard

ADVICE: In the spring it is normal to see fox kits or coyote pups romping and tumbling in the yard, playing like puppies. The play activity they are exhibiting is all in preparation to go out on hunting trips with mom, but they are not quite ready to go yet. They will be accompanying her soon and their use of the den and yard will only last a short while longer. As cute as the kits/pups are, it is important that you do not feed them or initiate contact in order to ensure that they don't lose their fear of humans, which will lead to a host of serious problems. Instead, leave them alone. If they get too close, clap your hands and yell to scare the kits/pups and teach them to associate humans with a negative stimulus. Orphaned pups or kits are very rare, as both parents aid in the rearing of their young (unlike most other mammals, who are raised by the mother only).

Coyote/Fox Den on Property

ADVICE: People are often surprised to discover a coyote or fox den near their property. This is no cause for alarm. It can be a lot of fun (and a great photo opportunity) to watch a fox or coyote family grow up.

If the animals absolutely *must* be evicted, harassment strategies can be used to encourage them to leave. Dirty, sweaty socks or rags sprinkled with vinegar can be put into the den entrance along with a blaring radio. This should make the coyotes or foxes uncomfortable and motivate them to move on. However, they may be resistant—it can be a lot of work to find and excavate a new den.

BETTER OPTION: After learning that their fears were unfounded, many people find that letting the coyote or fox family stay is the easiest option, and one which becomes a memorable rare treat!