



MONTEREY NEWS

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Eastern Coyotes Thrive on The Edge of Suburbia

The neighborhood coyote visiting our backyards, or seen running along country roads in the headlights of our cars, has evolved through cross-breeding to be nearly as large as a German shepherd. It has become so much bigger than the small twenty-five-pound western canine I saw as a Walt Disney cartoon character! Researchers have estimated the eastern coyote to be 60% western coyote (a smaller canid that hunts alone for smaller prey), 30% gray wolf (larger, hunts in packs for larger prey), and 10% domesticated dog (varying sizes but habituated to people). They have been variously called “coywolves” or “coy-dogs.” Some biologists consider them sufficiently distinct from each of these other canids, the result of a “hybrid swarm,” that they might be considered a separate sub-species. Typically, hybridization is thought to weaken animals, but this mix has been very successful for these animals.

Judging from the recent population growth, it soon will appear to be too close for comfort. At the drop of a hat the coyotes can move around at forty miles an hour, adding to its typical eleven-square-mile range in just a short time, adapting its diet to include rabbits, woodchucks, wild turkeys, and feral cats. Eastern coyotes with larger body sizes and stronger jaws (from the wolf side) will even hunt in packs for larger prey like deer. Unfortunately, the coyotes diet often includes pet tabbies and small dogs let outside for a brief opportunity to relieve themselves, making these coyotes very unpopular anywhere.



At the last coyote den I visited I found a wide variety of bits of fur and feathers including evidence of white-tailed deer fawns.

Just last week, while looking out my back picture window on Little Bay in Fairhaven, I was astonished to see a very large coyote looking back at me with a wild gaze, and apparently not disturbed by his proximity to me.

My nearest neighbors along Indian Way leading down to our beach report hearing howling at night from a family of coyotes, which starts off with a blood curdling howl followed by a wavering harmony, to another den far off in the distance. (Researchers think the deep howls are remnants of wolf traits, while the wavering harmony comes from the western coyotes.) They seem to be inspired by a full October moon rising over the horizon. Although their motivation to sing seems to be a primitive

pleasure of orchestration, and can lead people to be fearful, coyote attacks on people are historically very rare and preventable by human caution.

An angry, dangerous coyote attack that results with being bitten can happen by someone trying to rescue pets from attack, or if the coyote is being fed by someone. Under no circumstance is the killing of a wild animal as an act of retribution justified. The eastern coyote is thriving today on the edges of suburbia, and people should evaluate a specific situation before taking action.

My daughter Elizabeth helped with my illustration looking across at Ashley Island, showing the colorful deciduous autumn foliage of salty rust crimson and seaside burnt orange. Nearby is a wooden osprey nest platform abandoned last month as they migrated south for the winter. — George B. Emmons