



Forestry Fun fact March 2018

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*)

History

In pioneer days, Coyotes were restricted primarily to the sagebrush lands, brushy mountain's, and open prairies of the American West. Wolves occupied the forests. Coyotes have since taken advantage of human activities to expand their range throughout North and Central America. In Washington, these intelligent and adaptable animals now manage to occupy almost every conceivable habitat type, from open ranch country to densely forested areas to downtown waterfront. Despite ever-increasing human encroachment and past efforts to eliminate coyotes, the species maintains its numbers and is increasing in some areas.

Description

At first glance, the coyote resembles a small German Shepard dog, yet its color can vary from animal to animal. Shades include black, brown, gray, yellow, rust and tan. Coyotes also have shorter, bushier tails carried low, almost dragging the ground, and longer narrower muzzles than their dog cousins. Adult coyotes weight 20 to 35 pounds with males being slightly larger than females.

Food and Feeding Habits

Coyotes are opportunists, both as hunters and as scavengers. They eat any small animal they can capture, including mice, rats, gophers, mountain beavers, rabbits and squirrels, also snakes, lizards, frogs, fish, birds and animal carcasses. Grasses, fruits and berries eaten during summer and fall. Pairs of coyotes or family groups using the relay method pursue small deer. These mammals are important food in winter; fawns may be eaten in spring.

Den Sites

Coyotes usually have several dens and move from one to the other, minimizing the risk that a den containing young will be detected. These moves also help prevent an accumulation of fleas and other parasites, as well as urine, droppings and food refuse.

Reproduction and Family Structure

Occasionally, a mated pair of coyotes will live, hunt and raise pups together for many years, sometimes for life. Breeding occurs in late winter, an average of four pups are born from early April to late May. Pups emerge from the den in two to three weeks and begin to at regurgitated food. Because food requirements increase dramatically during pup rearing, this is a period when conflicts between humans and coyotes are common.

Mortality and longevity

Coyote's, numbers are controlled by, social stress, diseases, parasites, competition for food and predators. Predators include humans, cougars, bears and other coyotes. Eagles, dogs and adult coyotes kill some coyote pups. Coyotes in captivity live as long as eighteen years. In the wild, few coyotes live more than four years; the majority of pups die during their first year.