

A Lunch and Learn Companion FACT Sheet

Edmonton is famous for its River Valley Park System—the largest urban park in North America. However, this is prime coyote territory. Can we coexist?

The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project

The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project is a research project about the coyotes that live in Edmonton. In 2008, Colleen Cassady St. Clair, a conservation behaviourist in the Department of Biological Sciences, asked the City about studying coyotes. This led to a 2009 study of coyote diet and a study of coyote movement and habitat selection. A team of interested City of Edmonton employees and scientists at the University of Alberta “are steadily revealing the secret lives of Edmonton’s urban coyotes.”¹

Are Coyotes Dangerous?

Coyotes are generally shy animals who like to avoid humans. However, they do have the potential to be dangerous. In most cases of conflict between a human and a coyote, the coyote had lost its fear of humans. This often occurs when humans have been feeding (directly or indirectly) coyotes. Keeping coyotes wild is the best way to minimize risk.

If you see a coyote, you should make yourself as intimidating as you can. “This takes an active will, because most of us would rather have a quiet personal experience when we chance upon an elusive wild animal.”² Because coyotes are more likely to become dangerous when they are habituated to (used to) humans, your safest plan of action is to “avoid letting the coyote feel comfortable and unthreatened around you.

Make yourself seem bigger than you are by raising your hands above your head and shout at the coyote. NEVER feed a coyote or try to touch it, and NEVER run away from a coyote, because their chase instinct makes them more likely to chase after something that runs from it.”³

Where do Coyotes live?

Coyotes’ main competitors for food are wolves and cougars. As long as the coyote is not directly competing with one of these predators for food, its range extends across North America from Guatemala to Alaska, and from the west coast of Canada and the United States east to the Maritimes and south of Quebec.

The rise of suburbs in North American cities has pushed human habitation into territory previously occupied by coyotes. Coyotes can be found in major cities across North America, though their preference is natural areas—like Edmonton’s river valley.

Are Coyotes Good for the Urban Environment?

Coyotes help control pests, especially rodents, which can carry disease. Rodents are Edmontonian coyotes’ meal of choice, though they also help control the populations of ducks and feral rabbits and cats.

Because urban coyotes are more likely to be dangerous than rural ones, it is often

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suggested that we attempt to reduce their numbers. Unfortunately, “persecuted coyote populations actually have higher reproductive rates and more animals are always available to replace those that are removed.”⁴ Coexisting with these animals—always remembering to keep them wild—is the most effective way to reduce dangerous interactions with humans.

How Can I tell if a Canine I See is a Coyote?*

Coyotes are medium-sized canines, weighing 9-16 kg and standing 120-150 cm tall. Their colouration can vary from gray-brown to yellow-gray, with a white/cream coloured belly and throat, and often a dark stripe on their back. Their bushy tail has a distinctive black tip, and is held low behind the legs. This trait distinguishes coyotes from wolves, which normally hold their tails straight out from the body or slightly higher.

Coyote tracks look similar to those of comparable-sized dogs but they differ in shape. Domestic dog tracks are round,

while coyote tracks are more oval (longer and thinner) in shape with a distinctive X between the paw pads. When walking, coyotes leave tracks that tend to fall more closely in line whereas dog tracks zig-zag.⁵

You Can Help!*

It’s easy to do your part to keep coyotes wild and discourage them from getting comfortable around humans.

- ▶ When you encounter a coyote act aggressive: Shout in a deep voice, wave your arms, throw non-edible objects towards the coyote, and make yourself look big while maintaining eye contact
- ▶ Never run away: like with most dogs this behaviour makes them want to chase after you
- ▶ Secure anything that could attract coyotes to your property (garbage, compost, birdseed, pet food, fallen fruit—see Operation Fruit Rescue).
- ▶ Keep cats and small dogs indoors, and keep them on-leash in park areas
- ▶ Never feed a coyote either in person or by leaving food for it⁶



FACT sheet

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Sources—Numbered items indicate direct quotations used in the text.

* Indicates that the entire section has been quoted from the numbered source at the end of the section.

1 The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project. [n.d.] About us. Retrieved from <http://edmontonurbancoyotes.ca/aboutus.php>

5 The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project. [n.d.] Avoiding coyote-human conflict. Retrieved from <http://edmontonurbancoyotes.ca/whatcanido.php>

4 The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project. [n.d.] Coyote ecology. Retrieved from <http://edmontonurbancoyotes.ca/coyoteecology.php>

2, 3 The Edmonton Urban Coyote Project. [n.d.] Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from <http://edmontonurbancoyotes.ca/questions.php>

Wikipedia. (April 15, 2017). Coyote. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coyote#Habitat>