

# Coyote Friendly Non-lethal Co-existence with Livestock

David N. Lee, MSc, Davey Resource Group, Ventura, CA; [david.lee@davey.com](mailto:david.lee@davey.com); 805-946-1700

It's two in the morning and a lamb sleeps nestled with her mother against the chill of the evening. Fifty feet away, a pair of alpha coyotes silently creep closer, lured by the scent of very fresh leg of lamb.

This scenario could end in radically different ways depending on precautions taken by livestock owners. On one hand, the lamb could be toast (or should I say roast?), setting off a chain reaction leading to the death of the alpha coyotes and an even greater influx of incoming canines ready to take their place.

Another scenario, which is increasingly taking hold in California's San Joaquin Valley and across the United States, leaves both the lamb and the coyotes unharmed. A suite of "predator friendly" wildlife management tools are now being implemented by ranchers, nonprofits, and agencies to solve the problem of livestock depredation once and for all.

"You have to start by looking at the big picture," says Rebecca Dmytryk of Humane Wildlife Control, based in Moss Landing, California. "You need to take a holistic approach to solve predation problems and consider all of the contributing factors – including the human element." It is essential to correctly identify the species of predator and the cause of mortality, she says (coyotes have been blamed for feral dog attacks).

"Understanding coyote biology and behavior is critical," says Dmytryk. Coyotes are dogs' "genius cousin" — they are relatively easy to work with, are smart, and submissive to humans. Compared to their larger eastern cousins, the western sub-species weigh only 20 to 35 pounds. They live in family units or "tribes" made up of four to six individuals; an alpha male, alpha female, and their offspring. Only the alpha pair mates and they stay together for life, or until one of them dies.

Using lethal means to control coyotes can actually increase their population, Dmytryk explains. When an alpha female is killed, all the other females in the group go



Coyote hunting rodents. Photo by Don Bebold.  
source: <https://bit.ly/1bRr1t9>

into heat, leading to a sharp increase in the local population (coyote litters average six young). It's the old game of whack-a-mole; er, whack a coyote I should say. There are better ways...

Coyote-proof fencing is one of the most effective ways to protect livestock, says Dmytryk, especially during nighttime hours. She recommends livestock owners install two-inch woven wire field fence at a height of five and half feet. The top should angle toward the outside. To prevent coyotes from digging underneath, the bottom of the fence should include an "L" shaped footer facing out (<https://bit.ly/2H2Boob>), keyed into the ground and extending 15-inches. Add two strands of solar electric fence along the top of the fence; coyotes are actually quite good climbers. Agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (<https://bit.ly/2gofEG9>) have programs that may help offset fencing costs.

Guard animals also work well to protect livestock from coyotes in some situations. Specially-bred Great Pyrenees guard dogs (<https://bit.ly/2Hfngaq>), llamas, and donkeys all bond well with sheep and can also be used to protect poultry and cattle.

**Resources:** For more information on non-lethal coyote management.

Project Coyote (<https://bit.ly/2SKkYIL>). Project Coyote promotes collaboration among stakeholders united by a goal of coexistence among people, livestock, and wildlife.

The Predator Friendly® Production Standards for North America (<https://bit.ly/2VJjxGl>) recognize wildlife stewardship on farm and ranch lands. Participants strive to learn about area ecology and wildlife and value the ability of their operations to serve as habitat for wildlife, including predators and other key species.

Humane Wildlife Control (<https://bit.ly/2UoQvLU>). Sound, ethical and lasting solutions to wildlife problems. Bay Area, California.

Davey Resource Group (<https://bit.ly/2VFFqPL>). Nationwide ecological consulting firm providing Range Management, Integrated Pest Management, Integrated Vegetation Management and Ecological Restoration Services.



Sheep guard dogs. Photo courtesy [www.CuyamaLamb.com](http://www.CuyamaLamb.com).