**Coyote Presentation Summary**

**Matt Stevens, USDA Wildlife Services**

* Coyotes are common and normal in urban and suburban areas; aggressive coyotes are not.  Coyotes are very adaptable animals. If we provide easy food sources they will spend more time in our neighborhoods. If we remove food sources they will move towards wildland areas.
* Coyotes are very territorial animals, with territories averaging 1.5-3 sq. miles.  They have much larger territories in rural areas where food sources are scarcer.  Living in suburban areas is easier for coyotes.  More food and less effort.
* Despite myths, coyotes are not pack animals.  They travel in family units, a breeding alpha pair along with their pups during the spring and summer.
* Coyotes don’t carry rabies, but they do have other diseases that could harm dogs.
* Attacks on people by coyotes are very rare. For perspective, according to the CDC (Center for Disease Control) there are 2200 dog bites a day in the US that require medical care. According to Matt Stevens there is about one coyote bite in the US every 5 days. There is a 11,000 times chance of a dog bite versus a coyote bite. There are only two known deaths by coyotes in North America: one in 1980, the other in 2009.
* The howling we hear is not when coyotes have made a kill. In fact, just the opposite. Coyotes are very quiet when they kill something so other animals don’t take the food away. Coyotes howl to tell members of a breading group where they are and, also, just for their amusement.
* Marking our yards with wolf or bear urine, or other things to deter coyotes is completely ineffective. Fences must be 6 feet high and go at least 6 inches underground, so coyotes don’t jump over the fence or dig under it.
* Breeding Cycle:

o   **Feb**: Breeding season (higher aggression).

o   **April-June**: Pup rearing (when human conflicts can begin).  Domestic dogs seen as threat.

o   **June-Oct:** Juvenile education

o   **Oct-Feb:** Juvenile dispersal—dominant pair “holds over” one or two females, other male pups are “booted” from the group.  Often don’t know where to go. What we may be currently experiencing is the young male “adolescent behavior”.

* It appears a few Coyotes in our neighborhood have lost fear or become “habituated.”   Three possible types of experiences from a coyote’s perspective:

o   Positive experience: human leaves food, gives food, etc.

o   Neutral experience:  human ignores

o   Negative experience: human harasses, hazes, makes coyote feel unwelcome

* 7-point scale of acceptable vs. unacceptable coyote behavior

 **ACCEPTABLE**

(1)    Coyotes heard, but not seen

(2)    Cats go missing, increase in “missing cat” posters

(3)    Sightings in yards and streets at night

(4)    Daytime sightings

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 **UNACCEPTABLE**

(5) Chasing attended pets during the day

(6) Taking pets on leash, chasing humans

(7) Sightings near children’s playgrounds, etc.

* Based on some reports Coyotes have “crossed the line” in our neighborhood.
* It is very difficult to re-instill fear of humans in coyotes
* The lack of fear is almost certainly due to human feeding of coyotes (either intentional or unintentional.)
* Relocation of coyotes is not only ineffective, it is prohibited by law. And, since coyotes are territorial, relocated coyotes would likely die soon after relocation. Also, if coyotes are removed others will come to take their place. And, when a community of coyotes sees its numbers drop it will increase breeding and the number of coyotes will increase in following years.
* The only solution for coyotes that display dangerous behavior is lethal force. When one or two coyotes are removed from an area this disturbs the dynamic of many breading pairs over a wide area. This usually results in changed behavior of coyotes throughout the area.
* People should continue make coyotes feel unwelcome by “hazing” them: throwing rocks, yelling, using an air horn. Using a gun of any type is illegal and may be very dangerous to other people.
* The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) has a group that studies coyote behavior and provides help to communities to reduce the danger of coyotes. This is the group that made the presentation summarized here. They will, for a fee, assess the problem and if they decide will remove a few offending coyotes.
* To lethally remove coyotes, USDA requires landowner permission to access their land.  Who owns most of the green belts and wild areas needs research. Permission to access those properties will take negotiation and time. The City of Bellevue, historically, has not been supportive of removing coyotes since they are part of the natural habitat, but Bellevue is only one of several land owners in the area.
* Homeowners from several HOAs in our area are interested in banding together for assessment and removal. If you are familiar with the website Nextdoor.com you will be able to contact them that way.
* Lastly, the problem with coyotes will not go away unless we permanently change our behavior. We must remove food sources and make them feel uncomfortable in our neighborhood.