

# Arapahoe Lake: COYOTE SIGHTINGS

## Physical Appearance

Coyotes range in color from near black to off-white. Coyotes in the southwest deserts are the smallest and the lightest in color, whereas those in the northern forests are the largest and darkest. Colorado coyotes are usually rust colored with white or gray throat and belly. Like other predators, coyotes vary in size. The males are larger than the females. The average size of a coyote is 37 inches long and 18 inches high. Their weight varies from 20 to 50 pounds.

The coyote is distinguished by its long narrow snout, pointed ears and general dog-like appearance.

## Tell-Tale Signs

Coyote tracks are very similar to other members of the dog family. Imprints show four toes and toe nails; front tracks are larger than the rear. The front tracks are two to three inches long and two inches wide. Rear tracks are two inches long and one and one-half inches wide. Their scat is variable in size and consistency, depending on diet. It often contains hair, berries, bone fragments and seeds. You are likely to find droppings along trails, atop knolls, near boulders, or prominent tufts of grass. Coyotes may be the most vocal

of all land mammals. Although most people are familiar with the coyotes howl, the animal actually has a language which incorporates a variety of sounds. They have long clear calls in addition to barks and yips. Their vocalizations are designed to bring individuals together or let other coyotes know their location.

## Habitat

In order to provide shelter for their pups, coyotes den in a wide variety of places, including brush-covered slopes, steep banks, rock ledges, thickets, and hollow logs. They will also dig their own burrows, or use abandoned dens of other animals.

## Behavior

Coyotes may travel alone, in pairs, or small groups. One factor that seems to affect coyote sociability is prey size. In populations where the major prey items are small rodents, coyotes tend to be solitary. In populations where large animals, like deer, are available, large groups of coyotes are formed. Coyotes tend to be more social during winter, when carrion is a very important food source. (Large groups have better chances of finding food.) Females generally have a home range of a few square miles; males wander over larger areas. They are generally nocturnal and sometimes diurnal (active both day and night). When coyotes are in close association with man with no disturbances (trapping or hunting), they are less timid and are frequently seen during the day.

## Mating and Breeding

Coyotes typically pair for life. If one dies, the other will look for another mate. They are capable of breeding with, and will breed with, domestic dogs. Males are capable of breeding when they are less than one year old. Breeding occurs between January and March. Pups are born from April to mid May. The litter size is determined by local population density and food availability. More pups are born when there are low coyote densities and when food sources are abundant. The female prepares the den. The male assists in the raising of the young and initially supplies most of the food.

## When Coyotes Meet People

Coyote behavior varies depending upon its environment. In the wild where they are actively hunted and trapped, coyotes are generally elusive. Near cities or in areas where hunting and trapping is not allowed, coyotes may be aggressive. In urban settings, they can lose their fear of people and may even threaten domestic pets. Although attacks on humans are extremely rare, there have been cases where coyotes have attacked young children.

- If you live in areas where coyotes have been seen, protect your pets! Coyotes will attack and kill cats and dogs. Do not allow your pets to roam, especially at night. Make sure your yard is appropriately fenced. We suggest at least a six-foot fence, or, better yet, keep your dog in a completely enclosed kennel.
- Do not allow dogs to run with coyotes. Although it appears they are "playing", coyotes can turn on dogs to defend their territory.
- Don't leave pet food outside. This invites wildlife into your yard and problems may result.
- Protect livestock, especially chickens, young calves and sheep. Contact your local extension office for appropriate methods to prevent depredation.
- Keep your garbage in a storage facility or in a tightly sealed container. Clean garbage cans regularly to reduce residual odors by using hot water and chlorine bleach.
- What To Do If You Meet a Coyote
- Coyotes provide an enjoyable wildlife viewing experience. Keep your distance and do not approach the animals. Enjoy the opportunity to view wildlife. Keep your pets on a leash when walking them.
- If a coyote approaches you or your pet, you can throw rocks or sticks to frighten it away.
- Use a loud, authoritative voice to frighten the animal.

- The State Division of Wildlife's information & recommendations as to what action to take should you encounter a Coyote is shown at left.

- Questions or Concerns? If you are experiencing problems with coyotes, or simply have questions, contact The Division of Wildlife either by phone (303) 297-1192 (M-F 8am-5pm MST) or e-mail.

wildlife.state.co.us/  
askdow/index.asp

- If you have an emergency situation involving coyotes, contact the nearest Division of Wildlife office, Monday-Friday, during regular business hours. Outside normal business hours, contact the Colorado State Patrol or the county's sheriff's office.

(303)795-4711