

Town warning residents to get smart about coyotes

In light of recent reported attacks on local animals by coyotes, the Town is advising people to get smart about these animals. That includes understanding coyote habitat, how to deter them from coming on one's property and what people should do if they come in contact with them.

The rolling hills of Caledon, with a population of nearly 60,000, is spread over some 700 square kilometres of lush land, including 260 kilometres of publicly accessible trails, and more than 65 parks. Coyotes are very adaptable and can do well in any area that includes forests. They are known to live in natural valley lands, ravines and parks of large urban centres.

When it comes to preventing coyotes from coming on a property, suggestions include:

- ? Putting up a two-metre high fence that extends at least 20 centimetres underground.
- ? Properly storing and maintaining garbage containers.
- ? Removing pet food left outside.
- ? Avoiding the composting meat products. The smell of the meat will attract the animals.
- ? Not approaching or feeding coyotes. Coyotes are wild animals, but can become more comfortable with humans as a result of regular contact.
- ? Remembering that bird feeders attract birds, squirrels and rodents, which may attract coyotes.
- ? Installing motion-sensitive lights in yards or gardens, as they will deter coyotes from coming on the property.
- ? Remembering that whistles, alarms or loud noises will likely scare coyotes away if they're seen on the property.

What should I do if I come into contact with coyotes?

Stay calm and wait until it moves on. Make yourself appear larger and make a loud noise to scare them off. Don't turn your back. Don't run. Instead, back away and remain calm. Never approach or touch a wild animal. If it poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 9-1-1.

What about my dog?

If you have dogs or cats, here's what to do to keep them safe:

- ? Keep dogs inside at night.
- ? Clean up after your dog. Coyotes are attracted to dog feces and urine.
- ? Spay and neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, domestic dogs that have not been spayed or neutered.
- ? Build a dog run. A properly constructed dog run can help keep your pets safe, whether your yard is fenced or not.
- ? Keep cats indoors at all times and keep dogs on short leashes or enclosed in your yard.

In order to have wildlife removed from property, contact a wildlife control agency. Keep in mind, though, that coyotes are extremely intelligent and almost impossible to live trap.

Provincial legislation prohibits the relocation of wildlife from their home territories. Therefore, trapped animals must be released in the same area or destroyed. Research shows that wildlife relocated from urban areas will typically return to their home range. When coyotes are hunted and killed, the population will compensate by producing larger litters and expanding their range.

The Coyote is a small relative of the wolf, averaging in weight between 30 and 40 pounds. They are very active at dusk, dawn, and throughout the night. Coyotes do not hibernate and may be seen all year round. Generally, they are shy, cautious and non-confrontational, but can be curious and experimental.

They breed in late winter. Pups are born in the spring, are weaned at six weeks and leave their parents in autumn to find their own territory. They don't form packs the way wolves do. If you see them in a pack, it is likely a group of siblings.

Coyotes cause problems in rural areas because they are predators to livestock. In urban areas, they may damage gardens, forage through garbage and possibly prey on cats and dogs. They prey on domestic animals as food and to eliminate a threat to their territory or pups. However, they also benefit agricultural and urban areas by helping to control small mammals, such as mice, rabbits, groundhogs and woodchucks.