

Co-Existing with Coyotes in Vancouver (and Anywhere Else, for That Matter)

by Robert Boelens

Coyotes were first spotted in the Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, landscape in the late 1980s, having been attracted by the city's green space, access corridors, food supply, and rodent population. Their arrival was accompanied by a great deal of surprise, myth, and concern. Coyotes were seen hunting on golf courses, sunbathing in parks and backyards, and trotting along streets and alleys. Soon they began to appear as the topic of local radio talk shows and café and park conversations throughout the city. Their appearance was unexpected and they arrived without invitation, but it soon became clear that coyotes were in Vancouver to stay.

Vancouver's coyotes adapted to the urban lifestyle quickly and with ease, leading to an increase in the number of encounters and experiences with people. Some coyotes began to prey on outdoor cats, while others dined on food deliberately left out for them by humans. Public opinion, as on any topic, was divided. There were suggestions of a cull, a trapping and relocation program, a public education campaign, and doing nothing at all. The one constant among all the suggestions and concern was a demand for accurate and consistent coyote information—something that, at the time, just wasn't there.

Although coyotes had been known to live in regions within 80 to 100 kilometers (50 to 60 miles) of Vancouver since the 1930s, their appearance in city and suburban yards and main streets brought surprise. Residents were shocked to learn that the

coyote was not the wolf-sized, nocturnal, pack-hunting carnivore that their first thoughts suggested but a 9 to 16 kilogram (20 to 35 pound) master of adaptation that was perfectly comfortable and amazingly discreet living in close proximity to active human populations.

Attempts to live box-trap the first coyotes sighted in Vancouver for relocation proved a failure; the animals would sniff and circle but not one of them would enter the trap. At the dawn of the millennium, every neighborhood in urban Vancouver had been, at one time or another, visited by a coyote, with certain areas—usually bordering large natural parks or golf courses—becoming well known for coyote activity.

As the 1990s concluded, there were a growing number of reports of coyotes losing their instinctive fear of people, an increased number of outdoor cats reported missing, and in certain areas, incidents of small dogs being removed directly from their owner's leash. Three incidents of children being bitten occurred in 2000; each incident received immense media coverage and caused fragmented panic, clearly demonstrating the need for an organized and effective response.

In February 2001, after open consultation meetings with government, environmental agencies, animal-welfare agencies, and the public, the not-for-profit Stanley Park Ecology Society in cooperation with the Provincial Ministry of Environment and the city of Vancouver began the Co-Existing with Coyotes (CwC) public education program. Two subsequent biting incidents in July 2001 provided the CwC program with instant publicity and recognition. The demand for information was greater than ever before.

CWC'S DEFINITION OF CO-EXISTING

The CwC program aims to reduce conflict among people, pets, and

coyotes by providing information to both targeted and general audiences as well as providing a direct response to individual coyotes that are starting to, or are displaying, behavior of concern. Stanley Park Ecology Society and city of Vancouver wildlife staff track, locate, evaluate, and use nonlethal coyote deterrents with consistent

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success in neighborhoods throughout Vancouver but, equally important, also recognize that coexistence is not always an option.

Program staff work to identify and help coordinate the removal of any coyote that poses a risk to human safety, and they support the provincial management plan that calls for aggressive coyotes to be destroyed. In Vancouver, one such coyote was removed

by the Ministry of Environment's conservation officers in January 2003 and a second in April 2006.

In an average year, Stanley Park Ecology Society staff visit between 25 and 30 neighborhoods to provide a nonlethal response to individual coyotes there and to train and stimulate area residents to do the same. The nonlethal response that staff members provide is simple yet effective, as coyotes consistently and quickly respond to staff displaying loud and aggressive-appearing behavior.

The importance and level of the volume and hostility used cannot be overemphasized. Residents who observe staff physically chasing a coyote out of the neighborhood with noisemakers as simple as a cookie tin with a few stones in it or an old broomstick recognize that the key to deterring a coyote is an aggressive appearing response and, moreover, having seen it work, one that they themselves can provide.

The coyote is pursued as long as its whereabouts are known. If it darts into shrubbery or under a shed, the noisemakers and broomstick are used to chase it out. Once the animal is out of sight, staff members spend additional time attempting to locate it, hoping to repeat the treatment. Generally, after one to three of these experiences, the sightings in the neighborhood sharply decrease or cease altogether, without appearing or starting in an adjoining area. If the pattern of increased sightings does continue, so do the use and frequency of nonlethal techniques as well as monitoring the coyote's behavioral changes for potential removal.

The majority of the program's daily operational work is, however, education based. It was recognized that the majority of conflicts could be prevented if residents became coyote aware, but the question remained: How do you inform them? The average Vancouver resident isn't particularly interested in a pause in a busy day to discuss or learn about urban coyotes or their management. But this

changes when there is a coyote in the yard or on a field at the local school. Then residents become extremely interested.

**WHAT DO I DO?
WHOM DO I CALL?**

The vast majority of the more than 5,000 people who have contacted Vancouver's coyote phone line since it started ringing in 2001, including local government managers, wanted two things. The first was to be able to tell someone what they had experienced, and the second was to be told what they should do about it. The coyote phone line provides accurate information (something that was not occurring when multiple agencies were answering calls), advice, and situation-specific responses ranging from answering questions about natural history, to an appropriate reaction to a backyard coyote, to an immediate on-site response.

The coyote phone line receives between 700 and 900 phone calls per year, again including calls from managers, and it also serves to monitor the city for areas where individual animals are displaying behavior of concern. Other agencies, including various branches of city and provincial governments, police and fire departments, and animal welfare groups, have all been happy to refer coyote-based phone calls to a specific, designated line. Printed material is offered to each person who calls the phone line, along with the recommendation they distribute it to neighbors.

**INFORMATION IN YOUR
MAILBOX, AT YOUR CHILD'S
SCHOOL, AT THE VET'S
OFFICE**

The CwC brochure is a quick reference point for the general public to learn more about urban coyotes and how coexistence is possible. It informs the reader of the coyote attractants present in their neighborhood, how to prepare for a coyote encounter, how to keep pets safe, and the dangers of feeding a coyote; and it offers contact

information for questions and specific concerns.

Printed material is sent to each community center, library, golf course, veterinary clinic, pet services business, elementary school, and child-care facility in Vancouver. The program distributes 10,000 to 15,000 brochures each year. Notes that report localized pet attacks, coyote feeding, and anonymous "coyote attractants on your property" are also available.

More than 100 permanent, 60 by 75 centimeter (24 inches by 30 inches) metal signs are posted in golf courses, off-leash dog parks, and areas

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of frequent coyote activity. The signs provide guidance about encounter behavior, pet safety, coyote natural history, and identifying features as well as contact details for additional information.

**WHAT ABOUT MY KIDS?
WHAT EVERY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL STUDENT SHOULD
KNOW**

"Coyotes 101" is a kindergarten through grade seven, auditorium-style presentation designed to provide audiences with the skills to identify coyotes (big ears up; bushy tail down; white smile that is a bib-like patch of

white fur), to recognize urban coyote attractants in their neighborhood, and to be familiar with coyote encounter behavior (do not run; try to appear BIG, MEAN, and LOUD).

Coyotes 101 emphasizes the above objectives while it provides additional natural history information and engages the students and teachers in an informative, interactive, and entertaining manner. On average, 12,000 elementary school children participate in the program each year.

The ecology society also reaches public audiences of several thousand each year; staff attend community events and lead interpretive walks through the "coyote zone" (any requested neighborhood in greater Vancouver), highlighting how easy it is for urban coyotes to survive in the urban environment and how residents can and should respond.

**COYOTES ONLINE, JUST
CLICK HERE**

One of the most successful and complimented resources CwC has created has been the compilation of most of the program materials on its Web site, <http://www.stanleyparkecolony.ca/programs/urbanWildlife/coyotes>. CwC hosts a comprehensive collection of resources, including suggestions for coyote encounter behavior, pet safety tips, reducing neighborhood coyote attractants, blueprints for homemade deterrents, common questions, updated sighting reports, brochures in 11 languages for downloading, identifying coyote features, coyote natural history facts and sounds, coyote conflict statistics, and opportunities to ask specific or incident-related questions, report sightings, share opinions, and leave stories and comments.

**COYOTE CONFLICTS IN
VANCOUVER: BITERS AND
FEEDERS**

To date, the Vancouver coyote has yet to bite the hand that feeds it; tragically, it approaches children and bites them instead. Of the six Lower Mainland incidents in which a coyote

has bitten a child, four of the involved animals had been deliberately fed by adults, and one was in an area where feeding occurred at the time of the biting. Essentially, the majority of coyotes that have bitten a child have been fed by an adult, a theme that is sadly consistent with coyote bites across the western half of North America. As of September 2006, the last time a child was bitten in the greater Vancouver area was in July 2001.

BYLAWS THAT WORK, AND WORKING WITH THOSE WHO ENFORCE THEM

A cooperative effort among involved agencies and government departments is essential, and in Vancouver's case, fortunately, it is the norm. When residents complain about coyotes attracted by the condition or rat habitat of a neighbor's neglected yard, the city bylaw office is quick to respond. The Untidy Premises Bylaw makes the property owner responsible to ensure that the residence and yard are maintained at a level similar to the rest of the neighborhood.

Failure to comply with the bylaw carries a penalty ranging between CDN \$50 and \$2,000. Virtually every urban city or municipality has similar regulations and each is prompt to enforce them. On other occasions, when coyote habitat (primarily overgrown or vacant lots) appeared on city-owned but undeveloped land, a work order for the removal of the bushes and maintenance of the property was promptly issued once the resident's concern came to the civic department's attention.

Prosecuting individuals who feed wildlife is a problem. Although Section 33.1 of the British Columbia Wildlife Act provides a minimum \$345 ticket and a maximum \$50,000 fine and a six-month prison sentence for anyone who "with the intent of attracting dangerous wildlife to any land or premises, provides, leaves or places in, or about the land or premises, food, food waste or any other substance that could attract dangerous wildlife to the land or premises" (intentionally or unintentionally feeds



Coyotes have large ears that point up. They can hear a mouse under 20cm of snow.

Coyotes rarely fight with each other. They use gestures and sounds to communicate.

The majority of coyotes that have bitten children have been fed by adults.

Coyotes eat a wide range of foods including rodents, fruit, insects and fish.

Surrey coyotes weigh between 9-16kg (20-35lbs).

Coyotes are active day and night.

Coyotes have bushy black tipped tails which they carry low while in motion.

THINK YOU SAW A COYOTE ?

You probably did. Coyotes are very adaptable and are found in cities across North America. They moved to Surrey in the 1980s.

If a coyote approaches: Be as **Big, Mean and Loud** as possible

- Shout in a loud and deep voice
- Throw objects at the coyote
- Do not run, maintain eye contact
- Move towards an area of activity

Coyote attractants in your neighborhood:

- Accessible garbage, compost, fallen tree fruit
- Rat habitat - neglected sheds and properties
- Outdoor pet food (stored or fed)

Pet safety:

- Some coyotes prey on cats and small dogs
- Keep your dog on leash and under control
- Never let dogs interact with a coyote
- Never feed coyotes

Coyote Info-line: 604-681-WILD (9453)
www.stanleyparkecology.ca

Report aggressive coyotes or the feeding of coyotes to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection at 1-800-663-9453.

coyotes), it is logistically difficult to enforce, as the people doing the feeding are discreet and difficult to identify.

Residents are thankful that the vast majority of their neighbors recognize the danger to their communities of feeding coyotes, and they react to news of feeding in their neighborhoods with shock and anger.

THE BOTTOM LINE (WELL, ALMOST)

The program has one staff member who cooperates with many more. Administrative support is provided by Stanley Park Ecology Society staff, and operational support is provided by a wide range of public agencies, private companies, and residents. The program operates on a budget of less than \$50,000 per year and receives core funding from the government of British Columbia and the city of Vancouver. It also generates funds from program delivery and material sales.

CWC TURNS FIVE

CwC has begun its sixth year of operation and is recognized as having played a key role in reducing conflict between people and coyotes in Vancouver. The fact that not one child has



Co-Existing with Coyotes



Coyotes in Vancouver ?

Coyotes are an extremely adaptable wildlife species that survive well in urban environments - including our City.

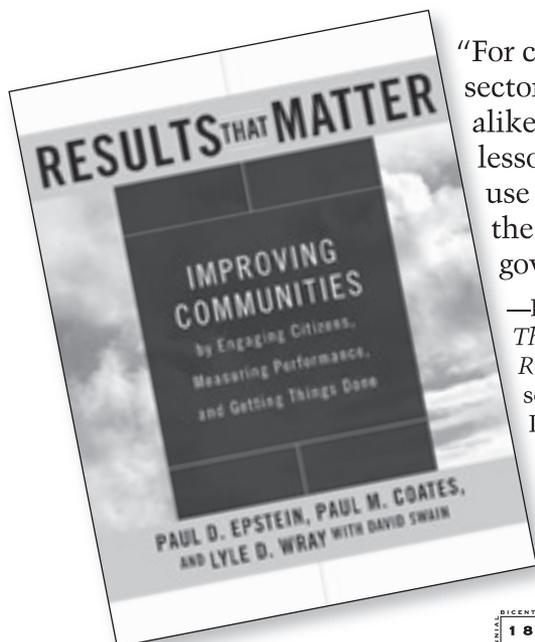


Coyotes were first spotted in Vancouver in the late 1980's and have been seen regularly around Queen Elizabeth, Everett Crowley and Stanley Park, UBC, Trout Lake and on local golf courses. They can however, be found in any neighbourhood - including yours! Report your coyote sighting to 604 681 9453.



Published information and signs are used by the Stanley Park Ecology Society to inform citizens about coyotes.

New tools for creating effective communities.



"For citizen activists, public sector leaders, and managers alike, it provides valuable lessons and examples they can use as they continue to push the envelope of results-based governance."

—DAVID OSBORNE, coauthor of *The Price of Government* and *Reinventing Government* and senior partner at the Public Strategies Group

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been bitten by a coyote from August 2001 onwards is a measured result of success, particularly when one considers there were five such incidents between April 2000 and July 2001.

The balanced approach that CwC brings has and continues to generate support from government and animal welfare agencies, school administrators, and members of public who have encountered an urban coyote. Most of Vancouver's residents have a coyote story of their own to tell. They have vivid recounts of their coyote encounter, often with varying levels of emotion and opinion, of the time they saw or heard one of this city's coyotes. Many of them now have a story of co-existence to tell as well. **PM**

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PM Excise Tax Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to guide lawmakers and managers in the use of excise taxes:

The utility gross receipts tax accounts for about 61 percent of the revenues from excise taxes produced at the municipal level but for only 28 percent in counties. Local governments should carefully specify in franchise agreements with utility providers the types of receipts included in the tax base and the tax rate. It is also recommended that utility companies remit the tax at least quarterly, preferably monthly.

The hotel and motel occupancy tax is benefits based in that it compensates local governments for the expanded capacity in public services (police, fire, highways) and indirect costs (congestion, pollution) incurred by serving tourists and conventioners. Studies indicate that a modest tax has virtually no effect on businesses serving tourists, especially hotels and motels. Occupancy taxes are usually locally administered, although state administration probably offers a somewhat more cost-effective alternative. As with the utility gross receipts tax, remittance of the tax should be at least quarterly and possibly even monthly by larger operators.

Local option motor fuels taxes provide a means of shift-

ing to vehicle owners the full cost of constructing and maintaining streets. If the tax replaces property or sales taxes used for this purpose, it will result in a more equitable distribution of the tax burden by shifting the burden to those using roads and bridges. As a way to reduce the inefficiencies created by the border-city effect, it is recommended that the tax be levied at least countywide and the revenue distributed to cities and the county on a pro rata basis. State administration of the tax is also recommended.

Sumptuary and other non-benefits-based excise taxes are generally unattractive revenue sources for local governments because of their high administrative costs and low revenue yield. Taxpayers see them as nuisance taxes and complain about their high rates; however, no mass opposition has developed because relatively few taxpayers are affected. Local governments should avoid using such taxes and rely more heavily on broader-based sales, income, and property taxes, as well as on benefits-based excise taxes, such as levies on utility gross receipts, hotel/motel occupancy, and motor fuels.

Source: *A Revenue Guide for Local Government*, published by ICMA, 2005 (Item number 43305; bookstore.icma.org).