

## **NatureNotes**

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### **Bryce Buckland asks, “Are there coyotes around here? Should I be worried for my pets?”**

The easy answer to both of those questions would be yes, but there is more to the story. The coyote, *Canis latrans*, is found throughout the continental United States, including Tennessee. They can adapt to their surroundings very easily, and can survive in urban areas as long as there is enough food and shelter. In urban areas they will eat trash, but also small cats and dogs; so there is a small possibility that a pet may become food for an opportunistic coyote. They will also eat pet food, rodents, skunks, birds and raccoons in urban areas. Coyotes can take up shelter in drains, culverts, under storage sheds, under porches, holes in vacant lots, parks, golf courses, or any dry area that may suit them as shelter. Caution should be taken as with any wild predator of leaving any extra pet food or even small pets outdoors if possible. At least be sure to keep them in a secured area that would make it too troublesome for a coyote to attempt to take your beloved pet as food.

Coyotes weigh between 20 to 40 pounds, similar to a medium German Shepard, with a slender muzzle, dark and bushy tail which is always held down when it runs, a very unusual canine trait, as dogs have their tails upwards when running or walking. Their fur is long and coarse, and usually gray or brown to reddish gray in color. They have an excellent sense of smell and vision approximately 6 times better than our own.

Coyotes are primarily nocturnal, but can be active during the day. Usually around the breeding season (January through March) their daytime activity increases, looking for food and den sites to raise their pups. Their natural prey during this time consists of rodents, rabbit, deer, insects, livestock, amphibians, birds, reptiles and amphibians, a well varied diet!

An interesting note is that coyotes did not always make Tennessee home, as they are native to the desert southwest, but their range has expanded greatly with the decline in wolves (a natural coyote predator), increased availability of suitable habitat, but also their ability to adapt to different environments. They moved eastward through Tennessee and other eastern states during the 1960s and early 1970s. Since then, coyote populations have been increasing in East, as well as Middle, Tennessee.

**-Rudy Morales, Naturalist**