



Wile E. Coyotes is here to stay in Florida

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

“Coyote power:
Surviving by one’s own intelligence and wits when others cannot; embracing existence in a meet, dancing, laughing, sympathetic expression of sheer joy at evading the grimmest of all fates, excluding in sheer aliveness, recognizing our shortcomings with rueful chagrin.

These are the values Old Man America has embodied for thousands of years.”
Dan Flores, Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History

The coyote is here to stay in Florida. Indeed, we have had coyotes for quite some time. In fact, right now, if you live anywhere in Florida, you will share the landscape with coyotes, or *Canis latrans*. They are found across the state and have been documented in all 67 counties. They are common in rural, suburban and even urban landscapes.

How the coyote arrived here is another story, and many different reasons have been given. One explanation is that the coyotes received free help in coming to Florida in 2007 from Texas, where the state for years tried to eradicate them with no luck. They reportedly were trucked in and released as prey for hunting dogs. Another report has the coyote in Florida in the 1920s. However, in 2007 they must have taken advantage of a new area and claimed squatters’ rights.

Another version of how they arrived in Florida is given by The Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) in a statement on its website: “Coyotes began expanding their range into northwestern Florida in the 1970s and are now considered a naturalized species in Florida.” The question many ask is: Are Florida residents in harm’s way? The answer is reassuring: So far, the risk is small. Consider that, according to the FWC, each year an average of two Floridians die from injuries due to dog bites, and each year over 700 Floridians are hospitalized due to injuries from dog bites. Plus, there are 1,331 claims concerning dog bites. However, according to the Urban Coyote Research Project, “Coyote attacks on dogs and cats have been reported in Florida, but unprovoked attacks on people remain very rare.” One of the causes listed was residents leaving food available, and this is preventable if residents familiarize themselves with the habits of the coyote and learn what to do and not do.

We follow this procedure living with alligators: Do not feed them, do not swim in their waters or let your dog off the leash while walking near water.

Some facts about coyotes:

- Their typical gait is walking or trotting, but a coyote may attain a speed of 35-43 mph when running or chasing prey. Coyotes swim well and are capable of swimming at least 0.5 miles. Although in 2007 a coyote was rescued from under the Boca Grande swing bridge, we do not know if it was coming or going or just did not want to pay a toll.

- Coyotes have no noteworthy predators in Florida. They typically feed on

mice, rabbits, large insects and berries plus any foods in open garbage. However, add cats and small dogs to their diet. This is preventable by keeping dogs on a leash and cats inside. Do not allow them to roam freely.

- Coyotes have been known to chase small children. Do keep an eye out for coyotes in your neighborhood and keep tabs on your small children. However, remember all the recent reports of an avalanche of dog attacks in the newspapers involving children and dog attacks. That should be our major concern.

- How would you Recognize a coyote? According to the FWC, coyotes are medium-sized mammals in the same family as dogs, wolves and foxes. Their fur is generally salt-and-pepper gray, with tan or brown patches. They have a thick, bushy tail, a long, pointy nose and pointy ears. Adults in Florida weigh between 20 and 35 pounds on average, and males are generally larger and heavier than females.

Some preventive actions against coyotes, according to the FWC:

- If a coyote approaches a child, adults should yell loudly and then move toward the coyote. That can give the adult a chance to lift the child as quickly as possible. That adult then should be prepared to back away from the coyote while being ready to defend himself if necessary. DO NOT RUN from a coyote.

- Use caution when walking pets in wooded areas or near heavy foliage, as these are areas where coyotes can den or rest. And always keep your dog on a leash. If you are accompanied by

children, keep them close to you.

- A well-maintained fence will keep a coyote out of a yard. Make sure the fence is six feet high to deter coyotes from jumping over it. Check the bottom of the fence to be sure there are no holes to allow a coyote to squeeze underneath.

- If you are on a walk, carry a loud horn or a noisy shaker can, and if you spot a coyote nearby, yell and make as much noise as possible. If you can, throw rocks and back away slowly. Coyotes hate to be sprayed bywater, so carrying a spray can of water is a good idea. Above all, DO NOT RUN. If you are on a bike, ride away slowly.

These suggestions are only an iota of information concerning coyotes. It is highly recommended that you access the sites of FWC for all the excellent information you will need to exist with the coyote.

Yes, the coyote is here to stay, and he may well be your neighbor right now. Your best bet is to be a good neighbor by avoiding him if at all possible.

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