



**New Mexico  
Wildlife Center**

## *Wily Coyote*

*Canis latrans* was once primarily a resident of sagebrush, open prairie or dry mountain habitats of the American West. Wolves occupied forested areas. Coyotes now occupy most of North America as the gray wolf has been reduced or eliminated from most of its historic range. Coyotes have been so successful in adapting to a wide variety of habitats that even human encroachment has not affected coyote numbers.

Coyotes generally weigh between 20 and 35 pounds with males being slightly larger than females. Its color can be anything from black to brown to rust or yellow. They are opportunistic hunters and scavengers eating anything they can catch and even relying on fruits and berries in summer and fall. Juveniles will eat grasshoppers and other insects. Livestock such as poultry and pets (mostly cats) may be taken. Most of their hunting takes place at night. Coyotes are very protective of their young and will attack dogs if they intrude.

Coyotes give birth and raise young in dens. They often have several dens, moving between them. They give birth to an average of four pups in spring. Litter size varies with population density and food availability. Females are primarily responsible for raising young. Finding food for pups becomes a huge task and it is at this time that conflicts between humans and coyotes generally occur. Coyote young generally disperse around six months of age. Some may stay nearby if food sources permit. In the wild, coyotes live about four years with the majority of pups dying in their first winter.

It has only been in recent years that any documented accounts of aggressive behavior by coyotes toward humans has been recorded. Generally it has been in response to feeding of coyotes. They quickly lose their fear of humans when they associate food with them. Like all wildlife, prevention by not providing access to food is the best way to avoid conflict.

- No access to food
- Wire barriers underground around poultry pens
- Remove dead livestock
- Guard animals—dogs, donkeys, llamas
- Always behave in an intimidating way when encountering coyotes.  
Clap your hands, throw a stone, and shout at the coyote.