

# NUISANCE WILDLIFE – COYOTES

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## BACKGROUND

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are very intelligent and adaptable animals. Because of this adaptability, Coyotes now live in just about every habitat in America, including suburbia. Nearly anything and everything is on their menu, surviving on whatever food is available. Coyotes will eat whatever they can catch, including, but not limited to rabbits, mice and other rodents, grasshoppers, small deer, dog and cat foods, squirrels, opossums, corn, chickens, raccoons, snakes, fruit, berries and birds. They also have been known to feast on the family pet, road kills, and will even scavenge through household garbage. (<http://www.gon.com/hunting/all-about-coyotes>). Coyotes are found in all parts of the United States except Hawaii. Their geographic range extends from Alaska, through most of Canada, throughout the U.S. and into Mexico and Central America. Coyotes now successfully inhabit all 159 Counties of Georgia.

## CHARACTERISTICS

Coyotes, a member of the *Canidae* family, share a lot of the same traits as their relatives, wolves, dogs, foxes and jackals. Coyotes look like a medium size canine, weighing between 20-40 pounds, with a long, narrow body, pointy ears and snout, bushy tail, amber eyes, and a mottled fur pattern ranging from black to reddish-blond. As with most canines, coyotes are equipped with keen eyesight and an acute sense of smell which helps them find any available food source. One way to tell a coyote apart from wolves and dogs is to watch its tail when it runs. The coyote runs with its tail down, dogs run with their tails up, and wolves run with their tails straight out.

The coyote is a very vocal animal. Known as the “barking dog,” the coyote has been described as the most vocal of all wild North American mammals. High pitched cries, shrieks or yips can be heard late in the evening as these animals communicate. Growling, barking and whining also are commonly used methods of communication.

It uses a long howl to let other members of the pack know where it is. It uses short barks to warn of danger. When a pack of coyotes is welcoming a member into the pack the coyotes yip. Other vocalizations include growls when establishing dominance, whining and whimpering when males and females are establishing bonds, and high-pitched barks to summon puppies. (<http://georgiawildlife.com/node/1391>)

The basic social unit of a coyote pack is a family containing one breeding pair and 2-4 other coyotes. Socially, the mating pair may mate for life and commonly can be found living within a small community of related individuals. Home ranges for resident coyotes’ average 2-5 square miles. Breeding usually occurs in late winter (February) to early spring (April) with five to seven pups born in excavated dens, hollow trees, under ledges or brush piles. Pups are weaned at about five to eight weeks of age. Coyotes have occasionally mated with dogs, sometimes producing crosses colloquially known as “coydogs.” Coyotes also have hybridized with wolves (coywolves) to varying degrees, particularly in the Eastern United States and Canada.

Coyote attacks on humans are uncommon and rarely cause serious injuries, due to the relatively small size of the coyote, but have been increasingly frequent in California. Coyotes are presently the most abundant livestock predators in western North America, causing the majority of sheep, goat, and cattle losses. Sightings in towns and suburban neighborhoods have caused many local officials to declare war on coyotes.

## GEORGIA LAW

In Georgia, coyotes are considered nongame “nuisance” wildlife (defined by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources as wildlife that becomes invasive or destructive), and therefore, can be hunted year-round with few limitations. (**See O.C.G.A. §27-1-28**). There is no closed season for trapping coyote in this state. You can hunt them with any legal weapon; electronic calls may be used (except on Wildlife Management Areas); and they can be hunted at night with a light that does not exceed six volts and is carried on the body of the hunter. A landowner does not need a permit to kill coyotes on his/her property, but does need a resident hunting or combination license for all hunters 16 years of age or older to kill coyotes on any other property.

A **Nuisance Wildlife Control permit**, issued by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division, authorizes the Permittee to live-trap, possess, transport, and release in a suitable habitat nuisance coyotes. In addition, the permittee is authorized, at his discretion, to euthanize certain nuisance animals and to transport non-endangered injured, sick, or orphaned wildlife to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

## NUISANCE REPUTATION

By nature, coyotes are timid and shy animals that tend to steer clear of any potential danger and thus pose little threat to humans. However, increased sightings and the occasional disappearance of small pets in Georgia communities have misconstrued the dangers posed by these animals. The Coyote’s adaptability makes them more tolerant of humans, but humans, it seems, are becoming less tolerant of them.

Prevention is the best defense against nuisance coyotes. The best way to get rid of coyotes without harming them is to take away their food and water sources. Another way to affect their food sources is to significantly reduce the rodent population. The only way to protect small house pets from coyotes, is to keep pets indoors, or only let them outside in a secure enclosure, or on a leash accompanied by a person. Harassing techniques like using loud noises and yelling are also successful in keeping coyotes at bay.

A coyote displaying abnormal behavior and appearing fearless of humans is uncharacteristic and may mean the animal is injured or has fallen victim to a disease. In this case, it is in the coyote's best interest to euthanize the animal to prevent any further spread of the disease and to relieve the suffering of the infected animal. Viral diseases known to infect coyotes include rabies, canine distemper, infectious canine hepatitis, four strains of equine encephalitis, and oral papillomatosis. However, the DNR considers the coyote to be an integral part of maintaining the balance of wildlife in the state, and therefore, they should not be harmed unless one’s safety and security is compromised.



## REFERENCES

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coyote>
- <http://georgiawildlife.com/node/1391>
- <http://www.livescience.com/27976-coyotes.html>
- <http://www.gon.com/hunting/all-about-coyotes>
- <http://georgiawildlife.com/node/1391>
- <http://www.gon.com/hunting/all-about-coyotes>

## APPENDIX I

### O.C.G.A. §27-1-28 (2010) Taking of nongame species

(a) Except as otherwise provided by law, rule, or regulation, it shall be unlawful to hunt, trap, fish, take, possess, or transport any nongame species of wildlife, except that the following species may be taken by any method except those specifically prohibited by law or regulation:

- (1) Rats;
- (2) Mice;
- (3) Coyotes;
- (4) Armadillos;
- (5) Groundhogs;
- (6) Beaver;
- (7) Fresh-water turtles;
- (8) Poisonous snakes;
- (9) Frogs;
- (10) Spring lizards;
- (11) Fiddler crabs;
- (12) Fresh-water crayfish;
- (13) Fresh-water mussels; and
- (14) Nutria.

(b) The nongame species enumerated in subsection (a) of this Code section may be taken by any method except those specifically prohibited by law or regulation.

(c) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to authorize the taking of any species which is protected under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, P.L. 93-205, as amended, or under any state law which has as its purpose the protection of endangered or threatened species.

*Credit to Kaye Klapper*

