

CITY OF BELLFLOWER



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"GROWING TOGETHER"

City of
Bellflower

Coyote
Management Plan

September 2019

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Introduction

The intent of the City of Bellflower's Coyote Management Plan ("Management Plan") is to provide guidance to the community and City staff in response to human/coyote interactions in Bellflower. Provisions of this plan maintain the legal rights of Bellflower residents, businesses, and/or homeowner's associations in protecting private property relative to coyote management practices. The Management Plan is based on already in use practices from State, County, and Local jurisdictions that include tools to respond to coyotes in an urban area.

Background

Concerns regarding increased coyote encounters continue to be pervasive in the Bellflower community. Coyotes are wild animals and have been increasingly taking up territories in close proximity to humans. The likelihood of these animals coming out of adjacent open space and into city neighborhoods will always exist.

Coyotes are opportunistic predators and clever scavengers. They primarily eat small mammals, including feral cats, rabbits, ground squirrels, and mice. Their diet also includes birds, snakes, lizards, backyard poultry, and some livestock. Coyotes will also prey on birds that nest on the ground, including peacocks. They will eat fruits and vegetables during the fall and winter months when their natural prey is scarcer.

The coyote is a versatile animal, capable of easily adapting to its environment. As a result, the urban coyote will often eat human garbage, pet food, road kill, and domestic pets, including cats and dogs. As is more commonly the case in urbanized environments, coyotes have been known to actively hunt cats and small dogs, and are able to leap fences as high as 8 feet to prey on domestic animals. Less frequently, coyotes have been known to shadow joggers and even approach humans while walking their pets on a leash. While extremely unusual/rare, there are cases of coyotes biting humans over the years.

In response to more coyote sightings in neighborhoods, City staff researched and reviewed existing Coyote Management Plans from surrounding jurisdictions, sought input from our local animal control provider, SEAACA, and held a community meeting to seek public input to develop an approach for the City of Bellflower. To that end, the City's approach will place an emphasis on education, hazing, and will consider employing lethal means of removal when the safety of the public is at risk as determined by the guidelines listed in this document.

Guiding Principles

The Coyote Management Plan is guided by the following principles:

- Human safety is the number one priority in managing human-coyote interactions.
- Domestic pet safety is secondarily important.

- Preventative measures such as reduction and removal of food attractants, habitat modification, and responding appropriately when interacting with wildlife are key factors to minimizing potential interactions with coyotes.
- Solutions for coyote conflicts must address both problematic coyote behaviors (such as aggression towards people and attacks on pets) and problematic human behaviors (such as intentionally or unintentionally feeding coyotes) that can contribute to an increase in coyote populations and subsequent conflicts.

The recommended actions in the Management Plan are designed to increase residents' knowledge and understanding of how coyotes behave and make clear how such behavior can be managed to reduce or eliminate conflicts with coyotes.

Coyote Basics

Coyotes are native to California and several other western states. Due to their intelligence, adaptability, the decline in larger predatory animals, and urban sprawl, coyotes have successfully expanded their range. As a result, coyotes are now found in all states except Hawaii and have established themselves in every urban ecosystem across North America, including large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York.

Coyotes, What Do They Look Like?

On the upper parts of their body, coyote pelts vary from gray-brown to yellow-gray. Their backs have tawny-colored fur and long overcoats with black-tipped guard hairs. The latter forms a dorsal stripe and dark band over their shoulders. Throat and bellies tend to be buff or white. Forelegs, sides of the head, muzzle, and feet are reddish brown. Coyotes have long legs, small paws, large pointed ears, and a pointed snout. Weighing between 22 to 25 pounds, their long legs and thick fur make them appear larger than they actually are.



Family Structure

Coyotes may live alone, in pairs, or in family groups with one breeding pair, generally mating once a year, usually December through February. Social organization and group size are highly correlated with food availability. The rest of the group is comprised of multiple generations of offspring. Pups are born March through May. Litter size depends on available resources and the number of coyotes in the area. More available food resources, shelter, and unoccupied territories tend to result in larger litter sizes. The converse is also true.

Although a litter varies from 2 to 12 pups, the average is 6 or 7. Pups remain in the den for the first few weeks of life and then travel with adults. By the end of summer, they are more independent but may still travel with parents and siblings. This is what is often seen and described as “packs” of coyotes; however, this is only indicative of the den’s hierarchy

and social structure and does not necessarily lend itself to a small or large coyote population in the surrounding area. Because coyotes are socially organized, the group raises the young and defends their territory from other coyotes. Territories do not overlap and although coyotes generally live in groups, they often travel alone or in pairs.

In urban areas, most coyotes live in large parks, golf courses, greenways, riverbeds and natural open spaces where food and shelter are abundant. Thus, their territory may follow the park or open space boundaries, which are often along urban-wildland interfaces. Coyotes are extremely adaptive at creating territories under a wide range of urban conditions.

Coyote Dens

Coyote dens are holes dug out in the ground. It can be a few feet in length or up to about 50 feet. Coyotes often use ready-made “den-like” holes in an existing area, like an enclosed space surrounded by trees or brush. They will also take over dens that were left by other burrowing animals.

As stated, coyotes are opportunistic animals and will use any hidden hole or structure to protect their young from fleas and vermin. Coyotes will often use sticks and other natural covers to hide the entrances to their dens, allowing just enough space for them to move in and out with food they have hunted for their young.

The Human Element

People respond to coyotes in various ways. Some observe them with enjoyment, others with indifference, and some with fear and concern. Personal experiences with coyotes may influence their perceptions. Experiences range from animal sightings without incident to stalking, killing of pets, or, at the extreme, a violent interaction. Because wild animals can evoke fear, actual sightings and perceptions may become exaggerated or misconstrued.

Coyote Management Plan Goal

The goal of the Coyote Management Plan is to discourage the habituation of coyotes in an urban environment by using education, behavior modification, and development of a tiered response to aggressive coyote behavior. The recommended actions in this Management Plan are designed to increase knowledge and understanding of how coyotes behave and to make clear how such behavior can be managed or reduced to eliminate human conflicts with coyotes. The ultimate goal of coyote behavior modification is to encourage the natural relocation of coyotes to their native environment.

The strategy for managing coyotes is based on balancing respect and protection of wildlife without compromising public safety. The main strategy is a multi-focused approach consisting of:

1. *Education*
2. *Enforcement*
3. *Response Matrix*

Education

Coyote awareness education is critical for residents to make informed decisions regarding their safety, and that of their property and pets, by decreasing attractants, reshaping coyote behavior, and creating reasonable expectations of normal coyote behavior. Dissemination of information to residents, businesses, and schools will be accomplished through the use of the City of Bellflower website, City Newsletter, social media, press releases, community forums, community partnerships (SEAACA), and other direct and indirect public outreach campaigns.

Learning how to respond to a coyote encounter empowers residents and supports reshaping undesired coyote behavior. The public should understand what normal coyote behavior is when living in close proximity with coyotes. For example, vocalization (coyote calls) is normal, acceptable behavior and does not indicate aggression.

Enforcement

The act of feeding wildlife is known to lead to an increase in wildlife activity. Feeding can attract coyotes and their prey to an area leading to an likelihood of creating habituated coyotes and resulting in increases in coyote-human interactions. California law prohibits feeding wildlife, including coyotes. Bellflower's Animal Control provider (SEAACA) will enforce laws pertaining to this activity.

Response Matrix

A detailed, tiered Response Matrix has been developed to provide a mechanism for identifying and classifying different levels of human coyote interactions. This Response Matrix serves as a guide for residents and the City of Bellflower to respond to reports of coyote interactions in order of magnitude.

Education – Discouraging Coyotes in Bellflower

While attacks on humans are very rare, urban landscape development, habituation through intentional and unintentional feeding, pet related incidents, and media attention have led some residents to fear coyotes. It is important to note that attacks on free-roaming and unattended small pets are normal coyote behavior and do not necessarily indicate a danger for people.

Coyotes usually become habituated when they learn and associate people and/or neighborhoods with sources of food. Residents reinforce this behavior by not reacting appropriately when seeing a coyote. Steps must be taken to address safety concerns and misconceptions and to ensure appropriate responses to potential threats to human

safety. It's important to keep in mind that coyotes have been in and around Bellflower (and other parts of Southern California) since before the area was settled.

Coyotes are drawn to urban and suburban areas for the following reasons:

1. **FOOD** – Urban areas provide a bounty of natural food choices for coyotes that primarily eat rodents such as mice and rats. However, coyotes can be further attracted into suburban neighborhoods by human-associated foods such as pet food, unsecured compost or trash, and fallen fruit in yards. Intentional and unintentional feeding can lead coyotes to associate humans with sources of food, which can result in negative interactions among coyotes, people, and pets. To reduce food attractants in urban and suburban areas:
 - Never hand-feed or otherwise deliberately feed a coyote.
 - Never feed/maintain feral cats, as this practice leads to an increase in the area feral cat population (i.e. coyote food).
 - Avoid feeding pets outside. Remove sources of pet food and water. If feeding pets outside is necessary, remove the bowl and any leftover food promptly.
 - Never compost any meat or dairy products (unless the compost is fully secured).
 - Maintain good housekeeping, such as regularly raking areas around bird feeders, to help discourage coyote activity near residences.
 - Remove fallen fruit from the ground.
 - Keep trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids. Only place the cans curbside the morning of collections. If left out overnight, trash cans are more likely to be tipped over and broken into.
 - Bag especially attractive food waste such as meat scraps or leftover pet food before discarding.
2. **WATER** – Urban areas provide a year-round supply of water in the form of storm water channels, irrigation, swimming pools, and pet water dishes, which support both coyotes and their prey. In dry conditions, water can be as alluring as food, so remove water bowls set outside for pets and make watering cans unavailable.
3. **ACCESS TO SHELTER** – Parks, greenbelts, open spaces, golf courses, buildings, sheds, decks, and crawl spaces increase the amount of cover for coyotes. They allow coyotes to safely and easily remain close to people, pets, homes, and businesses without detection. In the spring, when coyotes give birth and begin to raise their young, they concentrate their activities around dens or burrows in which their young are sheltered. Coyotes may take advantage of available spaces under sheds or decks for use as a den, bringing them into close contact with people and pets.
4. **UNATTENDED PETS** – Coyotes primarily eat small mammals such as mice and rats, but will also prey on slightly larger mammals such as rabbits and groundhogs. Animals that are approximately the same size as a groundhog or rabbit, especially unattended outdoor cats and small dogs, attract coyotes into neighborhoods.

- The best way to minimize risk to pets from coyotes (and the other dangers of outdoor life such as cars, disease, and other wildlife) is to keep small pets indoors or only let them outside in a secure enclosure or when accompanied by a person and under the control of a leash and harness.
- It is important to either keep dogs on a leash six feet long or shorter when outdoors or to stay within six feet of them when outside. (Coyotes may view a dog on a leash longer than six feet as an unattended pet.) Attacks on free-roaming small cats or dogs are normal coyote behavior and do not indicate a danger for people. A free-roaming pet is considered an unattended domestic pet outside of its enclosed yard or area.
- Although attacks on larger dogs are rare, coyotes will sometimes go after a large dog when they feel that their territory is threatened. This generally occurs during the coyote breeding season, which takes place from January through March. During this time, it is especially important not to let dogs outside unattended and to keep them on leashes (six feet long or less) when in public areas.

5. **FERAL CATS** – people who feed feral cats cause more harm than good as it leads to the spread of disease and coyotes often frequent these locations. Although there is no sure way to protect feral cats from coyotes, the following tips can be helpful:

- Do not feed feral cats.
- If feral cats frequent your neighborhood, please contact SEAACA.
- Haze coyotes seen near feral cat locations. Making them feel uncomfortable may encourage them to stay out of the area.

Other domestic animals kept outside, such as rabbits, may also be viewed as prey by coyotes. Protect outdoor animals from coyotes and other predators with protective fencing, ensuring that they are confined in sturdy cages each evening.

Hazing and Behavior Change

Coyote hazing can be a deterrent to discourage coyotes from residential neighborhoods. Some coyotes have become too comfortable in close proximity to people. To safely manage coyote/human interactions, it's important to modify this behavior and attitude in resident coyote populations. Habituated coyote behavior needs to be reshaped to encourage coyotes to avoid contact with humans and pets.

Hazing – also known as “fear conditioning” – is the process that facilitates this change and is by necessity a community response to negative encounters with coyotes. The more often an individual animal is hazed, the more effective hazing is in changing coyote behavior.

Hazing employs immediate use of deterrents to move an animal out of an area or discourage undesirable behavior or activity. Deterrents include loud noises, spraying water, bright lights, throwing objects, and shouting. Hazing can help maintain a coyote's fear of humans and discourage them from neighborhoods such as backyards and play

areas. Hazing does not harm or damage animals, humans, or property. Behavioral change also involves human activities such as how to identify and remove attractants and how to responsibly protect pets.

Goals of Hazing

1. To reshape coyote behavior to avoid human contact in an urban setting. Human behavior can shape animal behavior, in either a negative or positive manner. People living in close proximity to coyotes can remove coyote attractants, identify potentially dangerous situations for their pets and themselves, and respond in a manner designed to change coyote behavior.
2. To provide residents information and tools to actively engage in reshaping coyote behavior and to support feeling safe in their parks and neighborhoods. This can be accomplished by educating residents on hazing techniques.

General Considerations

1. Levels of hazing need to be appropriately relevant to coyote activity.
 - Coyotes are best left alone. Ignore them if they are ignoring you. As with any wild animal, maintaining personal safety should be the first goal.
 - Coyotes are often out late at night and early in the morning when few people are present. This is normal acceptable behavior. Hazing may not be necessary.
2. Hazing must be more exaggerated, aggressive, and consistent when first applied. As coyotes “learn” appropriate responses to hazing, it will take less effort from hazers. Early in the process, it is extremely common for coyotes not to respond to hazing techniques. Without a history of hazing, they do not have the relevant context to respond in the desired outcome (to leave).
3. Techniques and tools can be used in the same manner for one or multiple coyotes. Usually there is a dominant coyote in a group who will respond - others will follow its lead. DO NOT ignore, turn your back, or avoid hazing because there are multiple coyotes instead of a single individual coyote.

Hazing techniques include:

- Yelling and waving your arms.
 - Noisemakers; your voice, air horns, bells, soda cans filled with pennies.
 - Projectiles; sticks, cans, or rubber ball.
 - Water hose, walking stick, or bear repellent.
4. The more often an individual coyote is hazed by a variety of tools and techniques and a variety of people, the more effective hazing will be in changing that animal’s future behavior.

5. Hazing must be directly associated with the person involved in the hazing actions. The coyote must be aware of where the potential threat is coming from and identify the person.
6. Coyotes can and do recognize individual people and animals in their territories. They can learn to avoid or harass specific individuals in response to behavior of the person and/or pet.
7. Coyotes can be routine in habit. Identifying their normal habits can help target which habits to change. For example, the coyote patrols the same bike path at the same time in the morning three to five days a week. Hazers should concentrate on that time and place to encourage the animal to adapt its routine to decrease contact with people.
8. Certain levels of hazing must always be maintained so that future generations of coyotes do not learn or return to unacceptable habits related to habituation to people.
9. Human behavior must change to identify and remove possible coyote attractants and ensure pet owner responsibility in pet safety.
10. Coyotes are skittish by nature. Habituated behavior is learned and reinforced by human behavior. Coyotes as a rule DO NOT act aggressively towards aggressive people. The one exception is a sick or injured animal. Engaging a sick or injured animal can result in unpredictable behavior. If this is suspected, people should not engage and instead remove themselves from the situation, then immediately contact the Lakewood Sheriff's Station at (562) 623-3500 or SEAACA at (562) 803-3301.

Enforcement

The act of feeding wildlife can attract coyotes and their prey to an area, leading to an increased likelihood of creating habituated coyotes and increased coyote-human interactions. California law prohibits the feeding of wildlife. The following are some of the applicable regulations that may be utilized as enforcement tools to discourage coyotes from proliferating in urbanized Bellflower. To report the illegal feeding of wildlife including coyotes, please contact SEAACA at (562) 803-3301.

CALIFORNIA CODE OF REGULATIONS TITLE 14. SECTION 251.1. HARASSMENT OF ANIMALS

Except as otherwise authorized in these regulations or in the Fish and Game Code, no person shall harass, herd, or drive any game or nongame bird or mammal or furbearing mammal. For the purposes of this section, harass is defined as an intentional act which disrupts an animal's normal behavior patterns, which includes, but is not limited to, breeding, **feeding**, or sheltering.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CODE TITLE 10. SECTION 10.84.010.
PROVIDING FOOD FOR CERTAIN RODENTS OR PREDATOR ANIMALS
PROHIBITED**

It is unlawful to feed a non-domesticated rodent or non-domesticated mammalian predator as defined in this chapter.

For the purposes of this chapter:

“Rodent” includes ground squirrels;

“Mammalian predators” include coyotes, raccoons, foxes, and opossums.

Response Matrix

The Response Matrix below is intended to serve as a mechanism for identifying and classifying different levels of human/coyote interactions. The Matrix also includes guidelines for resident and City responses to different levels of coyote/human interactions up to and including the use of force to lethally removing coyotes from Bellflower neighborhoods. It is important to note the use of force may include other measures such as forcefully eradicating coyote dens or access denial improvements to areas where coyotes frequent to deter future interactions. Each interaction warranting the use of force will be investigated to determine the appropriate response. Coyote interactions are often times unique and warrant, in some cases, incident specific evaluations on a case by case basis.

If a human is attacked and physically injured by a coyote(s), the City of Bellflower will employ all necessary force to remove the offending animal(s) and/or contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for their removal services.

Coyote Behavior	Response Level	Recommended Action
Coyote herd	1	Provide educational materials and information on normal coyote behavior.
Coyote observed moving in public area	1	Provide educational materials and information on normal coyote behavior.
Coyote observed resting in public area	1	Utilize hazing techniques.
Coyote observed resting in public area with humans present	2	If area frequented by people, educate on normal coyote behavior and haze to encourage coyote to leave. Look for possible attractants.

Coyote entering a yard to a home without pets	2	Educate on coyote attractants, utilize hazing techniques, look for possible attractants.
Coyote entering a yard to a home with pets	2	Educate on coyote attractants, utilize hazing techniques, look for possible attractants.
Coyote entering a yard and injuring or killing attended or unattended pet	3	Gather information on specific animals involved, report on circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, and pet safety.
Coyote biting or injuring an unattended pet/pet on a leash longer than 6 feet	3	Gather information on specific animals involved, report on circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, and pet safety.
Coyote following or approaching a person and pet (stalking)	3	Utilize hazing techniques and pet safety.
Coyote following or approaching a person without a pet (stalking)	4	Utilize hazing techniques. If a pattern is present, use of force option(s) may be considered.
Coyote biting or injuring attended pet/pet on a leash 6 feet or less	4	Gather information on specific animals involved, document circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, and pet safety. Use of force option(s) may be considered.
Coyote behaving aggressively; showing teeth, back fur raised, lunging, nipping without contact and/or with or without pet present	4	Gather information on specific animals involved, document/report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet safety. Use of force will be recommended.
Coyote biting or injuring a human	4	Identify and gather information on specific animal involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants. City staff will contact California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Use of force will be recommended.

Since coyotes are considered “non-game wildlife” any resident of Homeowners’ Association can initiate, at their own expense, action to protect themselves and their private property from coyote attacks.

Reporting Abnormal or Aggressive Coyotes

The City of Bellflower encourages Bellflower residents to report coyote abnormal coyote sightings or behavior. This will allow the City to identify potential trouble areas where coyotes are frequently sighted and allow the City to focus resources where they are needed most. Reports can be made to SEAACA at (562) 803-3301.

Sick/Injured Coyotes

If you see a sick or injured coyote, please contact SEAACA at (562) 803-3301. Any coyote sightings also can be recorded on a database (Coyote Cacher) designed to track coyotes throughout Southern California. This Coyote Cacher website can be found at <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CoyoteCacher/>. Finally, you can call the City of Bellflower Public Safety Department at (562) 925-0124 for assistance using the website or to report your coyote concerns.

Coyote Bites

If you have been bitten by a coyote and are in distress, **please dial 9-1-1. PLEASE SEEK MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY.**