



Coyote

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SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Canis latrans*. *Canis* from the Latin for dog, and *latrans* from the Latin for barking. Seldom does a scientific name so accurately describe the species in question. The coyote is certainly a frequently barking, doglike animal.

DESCRIPTION: Arizona coyotes are on the small side, seldom weighing more than 30 pounds. An adult measures about 21 inches tall at the shoulder, with a total length of up to 49 inches. The coyote looks much like a shepherd dog, the pelage being rather long, heavy, and often presenting a shaggy or grizzled appearance. The soft fur is reddish or tawny gray, sometimes tipped with black. The tail is large and very bushy. The ears are upright, and the slender muzzle is sharply pointed. Although the sexes have similar coloration, seasonal variation is considerable among individuals, and the immature pelage is much grayer and duller than that of the adult.

DISTRIBUTION: The coyote occurs from Costa Rica to northern Alaska, throughout the continental U.S. and Canada. It is known from every part of Arizona.

HABITAT: All habitats are occupied, from low desert to montane forest and woodland, but the coyote tends to avoid thickly forested, high-elevation areas.

BIOLOGY: Coyotes are monogamous. They mate in late February to early March. The 64-day gestation is about the same length as that of the wolf and domestic dog. Pups are usually born in late April. The number of young in a litter may vary from three to 10, but four or five is typical for Arizona. The location and construction of the coyote's breeding den may vary greatly with the topography and nature of the surrounding country. The den site is always secluded, or well-concealed by brush.

The young are born blind and helpless and covered with close, soft fur. A pup's eyes remain closed until eight or nine days after birth. At seven weeks, pups partake of solid food, supplied by both parents. By July, they are half grown and begin to accompany their parents on nightly forays to learn the arts of hunting and survival. The mother is especially attentive during this period; when danger threatens, a sharp yelp is the warning call. By autumn, the young are ready to leave home and fend for themselves. In most areas, only one litter is raised each year. Coyotes, like domestic dogs, live about 12 years.

Coyotes are primarily carnivorous. Even in spring and summer, when berries and fruits are most readily available, animal matter constitutes the bulk of their diet. Mice and other small rodents are typical prey, but in urban settings coyotes turn occasionally to domestic cats and small dogs.

STATUS: North America's most successful carnivore, the coyote, through its vocalizations and daylight activities, is well known to segments of the population who are otherwise unfamiliar with furbearers. Its innate ability to immediately recognize and exploit unfamiliar food sources and its tolerance for humans and their associated activities have contributed greatly to the coyote's success, where larger, stronger species have failed. Both hated and loved, the coyote is certainly the most commonly observed furbearer in Arizona. It is in no way endangered or threatened with extirpation from any part of its range.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Humans do not need to promote vigor of coyote populations. In some areas, where coyotes are substantial predators on wildlife populations (e.g., pronghorn recovery areas) or livestock, control measures are sometimes advisable. Coyotes also must sometimes be removed from urban environments, when conflicts with humans emerge. If domestic cats and small dogs were not allowed to roam freely, especially at night, and if humans did not feed them outdoors, such conflicts would be greatly reduced. 🐾

