



Coyotes . . . Can They be Controlled?

By *Ryan Prince*

Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Forestry Commission

There is a growing concern among landowners about the effect of coyote predation on wildlife populations. This seems to stem from the decline of certain local wildlife populations and the increasing contacts with coyotes through visual sightings or hearing vocalizations. These conclusions may be drawn prematurely because most wildlife population decline is because of habitat loss.

History

Originally the native range of coyotes (*Canis latrans*) was confined to the Great Plains and western regions of North America. Coyote presence in

Alabama was not documented until the early 1920s. These initial populations were the result of local releases by fox-hunters for sport hunting. A significant increase in coyote populations became obvious in the 1970s. The eastern expansion of coyote populations was aided by the decline of red wolf populations and land management practices such as widespread timber harvesting.

Ecology

The coyote is a highly adaptable species. This ability to adapt to a changing environment makes the coyote a hard species to control. It shows no habitat preference and therefore is considered

generalist. Not only will a coyote's diet shift to whatever prey items are in abundance or readily available, but it may also reduce or increase reproduction to adjust to its changing environment.

Coyotes are highly omnivorous, feeding on a variety of plant and animal material. They may prey on such items as rodents, deer, rabbits, insects, or fruit. Their diet varies seasonally: fruits and insects may comprise the bulk of their diet during summer and fall, whereas small mammalian prey may comprise the bulk of the diet in winter and spring. Coyotes are opportunistic feeders; meaning that they will feed on whatever is available. They will readily scavenge

carcasses of cattle and deer when available. Studies suggest that the highest incidence of deer in a coyote's diet occurs during fawning periods.

Perhaps contributing to the coyote's ability to expand its range so rapidly throughout the southeast is its high reproductive potential. Coyotes breed only once a year, with litter size averaging four to six pups. However, they are capable of having litters ranging up to twelve pups. Research suggests that litter sizes may vary depending on prey availability. Studies also suggest that coyotes will increase their fecundity rates in areas where attempts are made to eradicate them. This type of reproductive capability could explain why coyotes are capable of withstanding such rigorous control measures.

Conclusion

The coyote population is difficult to control due to the nature of the species. As land managers we must realize that any control measure will be an ongoing process. In isolated incidents, problem individual coyotes may be removed by trapping or shooting. All control attempts should be done with the intent to eradicate the species; however, we must realize that such extreme measures are not feasible. For many landowners it is just not possible to attempt such a task. 🐾



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References

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