

Coyotes

North America's Most Persecuted Wild Carnivores

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project
coyote 

Maligned, Misunderstood, and Exploited

Coyotes are North America's most persecuted wild carnivore species. Coyotes represent the pinnacle of unethical and unscientific wildlife “management” in the U.S. This culturally iconic species faces relentless persecution, despite **decades of unsuccessful extermination attempts by the U.S. government.** Widespread efforts to eradicate coyotes, largely pushed by ranchers and the livestock industry, have stemmed from the misperception they pose a significant threat to farmed and game animals.

Between 1947 and 1956, a historical **U.S. government agency called the Bureau of Biological Survey led an organized extermination campaign that killed approximately 6.5 million coyotes.** Scientific research later revealed that coyotes primarily consume rodents and rabbits, not the game animals or farmed animals they were and still are accused of depleting. Yet, the **U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services branch uses taxpayer dollars to continue these elimination efforts every year, killing almost 70,000 coyotes in 2023 alone.**

Coyotes responded to this intensive persecution with resiliency, tripling their range across North America in the last century and filling vacant niches left where wolves were extirpated. **Their remarkable adaptability has allowed them to thrive in diverse environments, including urban areas.** Despite this, **persistent myths continue the demonization of coyotes,** and a continued lack of legal protections results in their relentless and unethical persecution today.



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Coyotes' resiliency and adaptability allows them to coexist with human communities even in the face of habitat loss and persecution.



Coyotes, called America's Song Dog, use a rich range of social vocalizations, including melodious group howls.

Unregulated Recreational Killing

Coyote hunting and trapping remain largely unregulated across the United States, with most states allowing year-round killing, in unlimited numbers, using almost any means, including killing contests, trapping, poisoning, baiting, and hounding. **In the U.S. alone, it is estimated that more than half a million coyotes are killed each year, averaging more than one coyote killed per minute.** This approach stems from historical views of coyotes as nuisance predators (“pests”) or a threat to human communities, but **growing scientific evidence suggests such unregulated hunting is not only ineffective but harmful to ecosystem health.** Even bounty programs persist in several states. South Carolina’s Coyote Harvest Incentive Program offers \$3,000 rewards for killed tagged coyotes, releasing 16 tagged animals annually. Utah pays hunters up to \$50 per documented coyote kill through its bounty program.



More than half a million coyotes are killed every year in the US alone, often through cruel means such as poisoning, trapping, and wildlife killing contests.

Cruel Killing Methods

Current coyote killing methods raise significant welfare concerns:

- **Electronic calling devices exploiting coyotes' protective family instincts by mimicking distressed pups** or prey are used along with decoys to draw coyotes into shooting range.
- Various trapping methods, including **body-gripping traps, steel-jaw leghold traps, and snares, can cause severe injury or slow death through internal trauma, strangulation,** or exposure to extreme weather, with some jurisdictions allowing up to 96 hours between trap checks.
- **Artificial lights and night vision equipment used in night hunting violate ‘fair chase’ hunting ethics,** providing an unethical advantage to human recreational hunters and increasing the risk of misidentification and non-target kills.
- **Hunting with dogs often results in violent confrontations causing injury or death to both coyotes and hunting dogs,** while prolonged chases cause extreme exhaustion and stress.
- "Penning" is an especially cruel practice involving the trapping of live coyotes and foxes (often with cruel leghold traps) and the releasing of animals into **an enclosed pen where packs of hunting dogs are set on them, often mauling them to death,** for hunting dog training purposes.
- Additional welfare impacts include the **orphaning of dependent pups by hunting** during denning season and the risk of wounded animals dying slowly from injuries. **Non-target animals, including endangered species and beloved pets, can also fall victim to traps** and misidentification by hunters, with countless companion animals dying each year.




Indiscriminate Killing Does Not Reduce Coyote Populations and May Escalate Conflict

Intensive coyote hunting and trapping can be totally counterproductive. The disruption of pack structure and territorial behavior often leads to compensatory breeding and migration in response to extermination efforts, thereby *increasing* coyote population density. **The removal of experienced adults eliminates those who would otherwise teach pups to avoid human conflicts** while creating vacant territories that may be filled by less experienced coyotes more likely to cause conflict. These outcomes demonstrate how **traditional lethal population control methods can actually escalate rather than resolve human-wildlife conflicts.**


WHY KILLING COYOTES DOESN'T WORK

Disrupting coyote families affects yearling coyotes' ability to learn hunting and foraging behaviors from older generations. This can lead to more conflicts with farmed animals, as inexperienced coyotes may be less cautious around humans, unfamiliar with the area, and more likely to be attracted to human food, increasing the likelihood of further conflicts.


Stable Coyote Family.
Only the dominant pair reproduces, and they behaviorally suppress reproduction among other family members and have small litters. Family members are less likely to prey on farmed animals.



Lethal Intervention.
Killing coyotes results in only a temporary reduction in population.




Coyote Family Disrupted.
Surviving members of the coyote family are broken apart, allowing more coyotes to reproduce at younger ages, and resulting in larger litter sizes and greater pup survival.



KEY

Female Male Pup Yearling Outside Coyote

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Understanding Coyote Ecology and Coexistence

Coyotes naturally regulate their populations based on food and habitat availability and territorial defense by resident family groups. **Stable, unexploited coyote populations maintain consistent territory boundaries, can develop learned avoidance of human areas, and behaviorally suppress reproduction in packs.** This natural behavior pattern suggests that coexistence strategies are more effective and more economical than lethal control.

To learn more about effective non-lethal strategies for coexisting with coyotes visit projectcoyote.org.