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From the Los Angeles Times

MODERN LIFE

If a coyote comes calling

Filling an information gap, a website records sightings and attacks by an animal both familiar and mysterious.

By Nancy Yoshihara
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YOU hear them sometimes at night -- coyotes hauntingly calling from hills or arroyos. They slink around neighborhoods, sometimes feeding on pet food left outside or preying on the pet itself. They've even been known to attack children.

A new website, CoyoteBytes.org, was launched two weeks ago by the University of California Cooperative Extension to gather reports of coyote sightings and attacks from residents of Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties and to share information. The goal is to prevent conflict between humans and coyotes.

"No agency in the state or county level collects conflicts between wildlife and people," says Robert M. Timm, wildlife specialist at the public education arm of UC's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"Some of us are trying to figure out what's going on with coyotes. We don't know the magnitude of the problem except for what we can pick up from newspapers, the radio or sometimes animal control at the local level."

Starting in fall, adult-size pups venture out on their own, establishing territory. Though coyotes prefer meat, they also feed on fruit, berries of manzanita, sometimes insects. They scavenge too.

Some questions about the animals, and answers from Timm:

Why does UC care about the coyote?

The coyote has changed its behavior particularly in Southern California in the last 40 years. Some coyotes, not all, have become very much at home in the urban and suburban environment. They have come to ignore people or in some cases become dependent on people for food and resources. A few have become aggressive with people and pets. We don't understand everything as to why this has happened. But it is starting to happen in urban and suburban areas throughout the U.S.

A quick rundown on coyotes?

Our presumption is that coyotes are living on the edges of suburbia in most cases where they can come and go, areas of natural vegetation -- arroyos, canyons or foothills. They will eat almost anything, alive or dead. They will often be in male and female pairs. After pups are born, there may be groups of adults and pups from mid-spring through summer.

Is a single coyote or a pack more worrisome?

It's more the individual behavior of a coyote, whether alone or in a pack. When it starts to ignore the presence of people or is fearless enough to be very inquisitive about people, pets and small children -- sometimes the word is "aggressive" -- there is reason to be concerned.

Will they attack kids?

Yes. On the website under "coyote information" there are a number of publications that can be downloaded. A 1998 report and another in 2004 describe coyote attacks on humans. These are papers reported at scientific conferences on wildlife conflict management. In the 2004 paper, we talked about specific attacks. About half of the attacks against people were on adults, the other half on children 10 years or younger. In Southern California since the beginning of the 1970s, we know of more than 100 instances of attacks. There was one fatality in Glendale in 1981, a 3-year-old girl in the frontyard. It is the only known fatality in the country.

Do you have coyote don'ts for homeowners?

On the website, there is a download called "Coyotes" written for the public. It gives a concise recommendation on how to manage your landscape, pets and children to deter coyotes from neighborhoods.

What do you do if you have a coyote problem?

If it is a safety problem, call the California Department of Fish and Game. The hard question is what to do if a pet is attacked or killed by a coyote. There is not one agency that deals with that. If your pet is killed in your own yard, no one will respond. So we think the problem is much larger than anyone knows about.

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