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COYOTES IN URBAN AREAS: A STATUS REPORT

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Abstract: Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) occur within the city limits of most urban areas in Texas, and the incidence of human X coyote interactions appears to be increasing in recent years. The major damage caused by coyotes in urban areas has been depredation on pets (primarily) and to other animals (e.g., ducks). Direct control of such problem coyotes is often hampered by city/state regulations and/or concern from local officials about negative publicity.

Coyotes are well known for their adaptability and probably have been in urban areas of Texas since settlement of the state began. An increase in the number of complaints received by offices of the Texas Animal Damage Control Service (TADCS) has occurred during the last 5 years. This increase has been especially noteworthy within the last 3 years. Coyotes, like many species, not only adapt, but thrive in the presence of man. Unlimited amounts of food, water, and shelter, accompany most urban areas, making them excellent habitat.

Coyote habitats and urbanization

One cause of coyote confrontations with people may be attributed to the rapid expansion and development of suburban areas which encroach on more traditional coyote habitat. In many cases, this is probably true. However, many sightings and reports are up to several miles inside the city limits of older, established neighborhoods. An example would be the reported activities in the city of Westover Hills, an affluent community surrounded by the city of Fort Worth. There is no recent tract or property development, but coyotes have existed for several years in the area.

On June 13, 1994, an inspection was made on a public golf course in Arlington due to the complaints of coyotes attacking and eating pets adjacent to the course. The coyotes were raising young on the golf course and this property was not near undeveloped land. Coyotes were observed on another golf course in North Central Fort Worth on the fairways by the course manager. These animals were reportedly reluctant to give golfers the right-of-way. Immediately adjacent to the golf course is an undeveloped pasture area of several thousand acres. In years past, the owner of this adjacent

property claimed to have lost several calves per year to coyotes.

During July 1994, a female coyote and two pups were trapped inside a department store warehouse 1 mile east of the intersection of Interstate 35 North and Loop 820 in Fort Worth. The coyotes came into the warehouse to feed upon scraps left over from employees' lunches and were trapped when an electrical storm caused the loading dock doors to close. An undeveloped area of approximately 1,000 acres is immediately adjacent to the industrial park in which the warehouse is found. Employees regularly fed coyotes at a plastics plant east of Meacham Field in Fort Worth, about three miles from the county courthouse.

Sporadic coyote nuisance complaints are received from DFW Airport regarding coyotes on runways. In this case, a large acreage around the runway areas is available for raising young and concealment. Complaints have also been received from Carswell AFB and Sheppard AFB.

It is obvious that coyotes can be found anywhere there is suitable habitat. Similarly, conditions for survival can vary greatly. In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, complaints and reports of coyotes have been received from the following municipalities: Tarrant County: Azle, Benbrook, Saginaw, Alliance Airport, DFW Airport, Grapevine, Southlake, Keller, North Richland Hills, Colleyville, Arlington, Mansfield, Rendon, Crowley, Fort Worth and Haslet. In Dallas County: Dallas, De Soto, Garland, Duncanville, Mesquite, Farmers Branch, Irving, Las Colinas, Carrollton, Wylie, Lancaster, and Sunnyvale. In Denton County: Denton, Flower Mound, and Lake Lewisville. In Johnson County: Burleson, Joshua, Cleburne, Godley, and Keene. In Parker County: Weatherford, and Aledo. These were received

within the last 2 years and multiple complaints are often received from a city. The complaints may concern 1 or several individuals, or groups of coyotes.

Scope of urban coyote damage

Damages from coyotes range from fear of rabies, to fear of being in close proximity to carnivores, to property, pet, and livestock damage. Several complaints have been received from joggers who are amazed at the boldness of these animals and are fearful of attack. After killing 11 cats and 1 small dog, coyotes caused an elderly woman in extreme south Fort Worth to be afraid of leaving her house. While coyote attacks on humans have been documented in California, no incidents are known to occur in Texas. But with increasing coyote-human interaction in urban areas, an attack would not be surprising, especially on children.

Property damages generally are due to chewing or gnawing activities. During the 1970s coyotes gnawed on runway light wiring at DFW Airport and within the last 5 years this activity occurred at the Temple-Bell County Airport and at the Longview Airport.

The majority of complaints received by TADCS in the metroplex area concern depredation on livestock and pets. A complaint was received in June 1995, regarding 6 dairy calves being killed by coyotes at Crowley, a suburb south of Fort Worth approximately 1/2 mile west of I-35. It is believed that this is the same group of coyotes that terrified the above-mentioned elderly woman that lives nearby.

Calf losses are reported all around the metroplex and are a common occurrence. Depredation on ratites, has been reported in 2 locations. Sheep depredations in North Richland Hills have occurred sporadically for 15 years. In July 1995, a fourth complaint was received from the Lakeside area of northwestern Tarrant County regarding coyote depredations on livestock. In this case, miniature goats were being killed inside a 15-acre enclosure. The use of llamas and guard dogs to protect the goats proved futile. Sheep, goats, and calves have been killed in this area of 5-20 acre properties. Adjacent, is a ranch of several thousand acres. Several complaints have been received concerning the loss of ducks and geese around

ornamental ponds.

The largest portion of these depredation complaints pertain to pet losses. On June 4, 1995, an inspection was made of a coyote depredation site in De Soto, Dallas County. Small dogs and cats had been taken from an affluent neighborhood by a group of coyotes believed to be living in a nearby brushy creek area. A coyote was seen by the pet owner with his small white poodle in its mouth jumping the cyclone fence, where it disappeared into the darkness in Arlington. A group of coyotes regularly raid neighborhood areas in South West Fort Worth and Benbrook for pets.

Another group of coyotes in the northern section of Benbrook killed 18 of 20 mouflon sheep in a small enclosure along with all the ducks in the pond. The most publicized and blatant depredations occurred around the Eagle Mountain Lake area in developed lakeside residential areas. This Tarrant county residential area had several well witnessed incidents of broad daylight as well as nocturnal attacks on pets. One schnauzer was actually jerked from the leash and carried off before the owner's disbelieving eyes. Larger dogs were attacked by the group of coyotes when wandering through the neighborhood at night. This caused most pet owners to keep their animals confined. One woman witnessed a large male coyote killing and eating her 11-year old cat on her front porch. the owner's screams were of no avail to the hapless cat.

Damage control

These attacks in the lake area became so numerous, TADCS was contacted and a meeting was held January 25, 1993, in the local county commissioners' office. In attendance were 5 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) representatives, a U.S. Congressman's aide, Tarrant County Sheriff, media representatives, residents, and ranchers in the vicinity.

As the properties were not within the city limits, direct operational control was implemented on the adjacent ranches where the coyotes were living. An assignment of 1 month duration was implemented. It was so successful that 3 subsequent 1-month assignments have occurred since the initial effort, netting 469 coyotes. No more pet or livestock depredations have occurred.

Unfortunately, this incident was an exceptional circumstance. Most complaints cannot be responded to with direct methods. No direct control activities occurred at De Soto, after meetings with city personnel, for fear of adverse media coverage. No municipality has given consent or variance in local ordinances making operational control possible. Various local animal control officers have had no success with live traps of any type. One particular employee smeared the live trap with dog food and became a very successful opossum trapper.

In many cases, state law prevents the use of the M-44 device, but in any case, the tools needed to stop some of these problems have not been allowed. Other TADCS personnel around the state experience similar circumstances. Technical assistance consultations are standard methods used to inform residents of their best possible courses of action under the circumstances. No change in status is anticipated at this time.

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