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THE URBAN COYOTE CONTROL PROGRAM

ROBERT J. ERICKSON, Wildlife Control Technology Magazine, Cortland, IL, USA

Abstract: This paper discusses practical considerations of conducting control of problem coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in urban and suburban settings, from the standpoint of a private wildlife control operator. The author provides advice on dealing with municipalities, the media, the public, and with clientele. Also discussed are appropriate tools and materials that can be effective in such settings, and effective strategies for dealing with suburban coyote problems.

Key words: *Canis latrans*, control strategies, coyote, municipalities, predator control, public relations, urban areas, wildlife control operators

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DEALING WITH MUNICIPALITIES

The importance of offering a comprehensive coyote (*Canis latrans*) control plan to municipalities is that it takes the burden away from the public officials, who might not have the knowledge to address the media concerning wildlife issues. This portion of your job must be taken very seriously. Any and all mistakes will be multiplied.

Once public officials and I have decided that a trapping program should be instituted, I ask that the program be approved in executive session. This means only the village officials take a vote to either approve or disapprove the program. If the approval process goes to the village board meeting, a member of the press is sure to bring it to the public's attention. If this happens, your job just became 100 times harder.

You will need to be the sole spokesman. Do not let the village officials handle media questions. They run villages, you handle wildlife. Animal rights activists will give their views, which are based on emotion, so it is very important to base your views on scientific fact. Challenge the

media to look closely at both sides of the issue. Remind them to make sure the other side gives factual statements to back up their emotional views.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

As urban coyote conflicts increase, the Wildlife Control Operator has a golden opportunity to educate the non-trapping public. I spend an enormous amount of time with village residents, and the media, to accomplish this task.

You may consider using negative stimuli to instill fear of humans in the coyotes. Although this has some merit, other factors need to be taken into consideration. The practice of teaching people, especially children, to confront coyotes by making themselves look big and stomping their feet, yelling at or throwing stones at the animals to scare them away, etc., is in my opinion an accident waiting to happen. It could cause an incident that endangers a child or even an adult. Many of the animals I trap in urban areas appear to be healthy, but necropsies have revealed that they were sick. Many of these animals suffer from severe heartworm and numerous

other parasites, but still have the appearance of a healthy animal. I do not encourage close contact with urban coyotes. Actions of aggression towards a sick animal could force the animal into a situation that they are unable to escape from. The bottom line is, we cannot take action merely on the appearance of the animal.

Another issue is that many residents who have already had an aggressive episode with a coyote are not willing to confront the animal again. Most of my clients are terrified of the coyotes, and some will even leave their homes until the aggressive animals are captured. As a private operator, I cannot expect the client to solve the problem.

The issue of whether the animal's health is compromised should be taken very seriously. Many research personnel do not utilize a necropsy. I believe this is a serious mistake when dealing with urban coyotes. I have a necropsy done on every coyote I capture. I need all the facts to put the puzzle together.

URBAN COYOTE BEHAVIOR AND SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are times when we will capture healthy coyotes when experiencing attacks on dogs, and these coyotes show no sign of disease. Most often the motivation for these attacks is territorial. This is especially true during the months of January and February. When attacks occur during the months of September to December, we take a very close look at the health of the animal. Most of the territorial urges have subsided in these months and the pups are dispersed, or dispersing. Also, in many documented cases a human-habituated or human-fed animal can be the reason for attacks during this period.

CONTROL TOOLS

From February to September, the use of a decoy dog and calling works very well, as the coyote pair are sure to protect their denning site from any canine that intrudes. Shooting can be a problem inside city limits. In most cases, I am deputized by the municipality to use a gun for the duration of the project. The use of specialized ammunition is critical when in close proximity to dwellings. The two I most often use are the .22 rimfire Aguila 60 grain SSS load, and the 12 gauge Metro Gun loaded with #3 tungsten shot. Both are extremely safe in the urban environment because of their low velocity and short range. The coyote's head and neck area are targeted with the Metro Gun, and the lung area is targeted with the .22 Aguila load. I keep my shots within 30 yards.

If a village attempts to limit my options for removal, I will turn down the job. My job is hard enough without taking my tools away. There have been times when they might say it is permissible to trap but not shoot, or to shoot but not trap. This is not acceptable to me. If one village is allowed to limit your tools, others will try. As one might imagine, communication networks between villages are close.

The use of foothold traps in an urban area can be a very tricky situation. The traps that I have had good success with are the Jake Trap, with rubber jaws, and the MB 650 with the jaws laminated for extra thickness, both inside and out. These traps capture the animals without injury. The most common set used in conjunction with foothold is the naked dirt hole set. It is particularly effective when large numbers of non-target animals are present. I also sometimes use the Reichart neck snare. These are set so there is no chance of entanglement. This guarantees that the captured animal is held without injury.

CONTROL PROGRAM STRATEGIES

My goal during the capture process is to eliminate the alpha pair. Once this is done, I like to wait a week to see if the attacks continue. More often than not, once the alpha pair has been removed, the problems cease. However, if the attacks continue, the removal of the whole pack will be necessary.

In many cases, the coyotes have been fed by people for long periods of time, and have become dependent on a food source that is intentionally left for them by irresponsible residents who believe they are helping the animals survive. The enforcement of wildlife feeding laws is very difficult, and even when a feeder is caught, the fine is normally less money than the feeder is spending on the food. So they pay the fine and continue feeding the coyotes. This continues to be a difficult challenge for communities experiencing coyote problems.

In urban areas, most residents who have dogs keep them leashed when walking. When setting up a municipal trapping program, it is important to observe not only the coyotes but also the amount of human foot traffic in the area. A prime example might be an area that is used by people more on weekends than during the week. This would dictate when you should set traps and when to close them.

Knowing where people might walk their dogs will also dictate what type of coyote lure is to be used. As one might imagine, the use of urines and glands would be ill advised when roaming dogs are present. Although most municipalities have leash ordinances, the capture of a pet off a leash, even though the dog is completely unharmed, would be a public relation nightmare. Even if the dog had no business in the area where the traps were set, the trapper still is going to be perceived as being at fault. If this happens, the program will more than likely be discontinued.

I can not over-emphasize the importance of constant trap checks. When traps are set in high profile areas, I will often stay in the village all night to make sure an accidental catch does not occur.

CONCLUSION

It is very important to institute a public education campaign after the program has been completed. The urban coyote is here to stay, and the public needs to understand. With a common-sense approach, and proper tools and techniques, coyotes can be managed, even in the most densely populated areas.