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Louis T. Berchielli

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Albany, NY, USA

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IMPACTS OF URBAN COYOTES ON PEOPLE AND PETS IN NEW YORK STATE

LOUIS T. BERCHIELLI, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Albany, NY, USA

Abstract: Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are currently common in most of New York State with an apparent increase of coyotes in urban areas. Coyotes can potentially cause a variety of effects and impacts. Urban coyotes can impact the general public by causing safety concerns for children and pets and by causing feelings of grief for attacked and missing pets. Politicians and government agencies can be impacted by calls from constituents to “do something”. Licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators can be positively impacted by significant business opportunities. Pets are impacted by coyote diseases and by being chased and consumed by coyotes. Efforts to identify and measure the effects and impacts of coyotes include a Standardized Coyote Incident Reporting System and human dimension studies. New York is also cooperating with two other studies researching urban coyotes and coyote foraging ecology and statewide population status.

Key words: *Canis latrans*, coyote, impacts, New York State

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COYOTE STATUS IN NEW YORK

It is generally agreed that our evolving coyote (*Canis latrans*) moved into New York State in approximately 1925 (Bromley 1956). Researchers first tagged a coyote in New York in 1957, which moved 24 miles before being recovered two months later (Black 1958). Bounties preceded the coyote but were ineffective in stopping the expansion of the coyote population and were discontinued in 1972. Coyotes were protected as a game species in New York in 1976. This restricted the taking of coyotes, except those doing damage or during specified open hunting and trapping seasons. Until 2003, hunters and trappers were required to report the locations of each coyote taken. From 1979 to 2003, over 45,000 coyotes were reported by hunters and trappers. This harvest data shows that coyotes are now located across all of New

York State north of New York City. In recent years there has also been an apparent increase of coyotes in urban areas of New York State including a few highly publicized excursions into New York City.

IMPACTS

Coyotes affect people and pets in many ways. Some people like seeing coyotes in urban areas. Some people enjoy hearing coyotes howling near their houses. Others are negatively impacted by any suggestion that coyotes are entering urban areas. One of the biggest impacts is the concern for safety. Fortunately to date, there has not been a serious human injury or fatality caused by a coyote in New York State. Still, people are often very concerned about the safety of children and pets. Some people misidentify coyotes as wolves (*Canis lupus*) or mountain lions (*Puma concolor*).

The later is often a mangy coyote with a rope-like tail. These misidentifications can unnecessarily increase a person's concern for safety.

There are a variety of other types of impacts. Some people feel grief for attacked and missing pets. Though not exactly the same as the concerns for rural wildlife populations, some urbanites are concerned over the potential impact of coyotes on backyard wildlife. A few urbanites experiencing heavy damage to plants by deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), woodchucks (*Marmota monax*), and rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) welcome the coyotes, and some instances of coyote intentional feeding have been reported. Pets are impacted by diseases shared with coyotes. Pets are also impacted by being chased, killed, and consumed by coyotes.

Negative impacts of coyotes affect politicians and government agencies by calls from constituents to "do something". Discussions of management options polarize the interested public especially over the use of lethal methods. If lethal control methods are deemed the most appropriate, further polarization can occur over which lethal control method or form of euthanasia is prescribed. Urban coyotes can create significant business opportunities and thus can positively impact Licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators.

None of the above mentioned effects or impacts have yet been evaluated in New York to determine which impacts are significant enough to warrant management changes. Such evaluation should include human dimension information (Decker et al. 2002).

MANAGEMENT

Since the coyotes were protected in New York during 1976, coyotes causing damage can still be taken with few

restrictions. Hunting and trapping seasons have remained long and liberal. The Department of Environmental Conservation has developed a statewide Standard Operating Procedure for handling coyote incidents which recommends lethal control of aggressive coyotes. The Department has also developed a standardized coyote incident report form. This enables better monitoring of reports about coyotes including number of reports, locations, and coyote behavior including measures of aggressiveness. The Department is also cooperating with studies researching coyote foraging ecology, statewide population status, urban coyotes (Curtis et al. 2007) and human dimensions (Siemer et al. 2007).

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