



wolf

coyote

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are intelligent and adaptable. Like wolves, they were perceived as threats to the survival of elk and other ungulates in the park's early days. Unlike wolves, however, coyotes successfully resisted extermination. Since then, research has shown coyotes eat mainly voles, mice, rabbits, other small animals, and carrion—and only the very young elk calves in the spring.

Often mistaken for a wolf, the coyote is about one-third the wolf's size with a slighter build. Its coat colors range from tan to buff, sometimes gray, and with some orange on its tail and ears. Males are slightly larger than females.

During the 20th century, coyotes partially filled the niche left vacant after wolves were exterminated from the park. In Yellowstone, they live in packs or family groups of up to seven animals, with an alpha male and female, and subordinate individuals (usually pups from previous litters). This social organization is characteristic of coyotes living in areas free from human hunting.

Coyotes, also known as 'song dogs', communicate with each other by a variety of long-range vocalizations. You may hear groups or lone animals howling, especially during dawn and dusk periods. Coyotes also use scent-marks (urine and feces) to communicate their location, breeding status, and territorial boundaries.

Until 1995, coyotes faced few predators in Yellowstone other than cougars, who will kill coyotes feeding on cougar kills. After wolves were restored, however, dozens of coyote pups and adults were been killed by wolves—primarily when feeding on other animals killed by wolves. On the northern range, wolves caused a 30–50 percent reduction in coyote population density through direct mortality and changes in coyote denning behaviors and success. Researchers see some evidence now that coyotes on the

As of January 2011 . . .

Number in Yellowstone

Total unknown, but numerous. In the northern range, the coyote population decreased 30–50% after wolves were restored, but their population seems to have recovered.

Where to see

Meadows, fields, other grasslands, and foraging for small mammals along roadways.

Behavior & Size

- Weigh 25–35 pounds, 16–20 inches high at the shoulder.
- Average life span 6 years; up to 13 years in the park.
- Home range: 3–15 square miles.
- Primarily eat rodents, birds, insects, carrion, elk calves, some adult elk.
- 4–8 pups are born in April in dens; emerge in May.
- Killed by wolves, mountain lions.

Management

- Like other predators, coyotes were often destroyed in the early part of the 20th century because they sometimes preyed on livestock.
- Coyotes continued to thrive because their adaptability enabled them to compensate for the destruction efforts.
- Elimination of wolves probably resulted in high coyote population densities; wolves' absence opened a niche that coyotes could partially occupy in Yellowstone.
- NPS staff monitors coyotes and uses cracker-shell rounds, pepper spray, or other negative stimuli to discourage coyotes that have lost their wariness of humans.

northern range have adapted to wolves and their population has recovered.

Coyotes also face threats from humans. They quickly learn habits like roadside feeding. This may lead to aggressive behavior toward humans and can increase the risk of the coyote being hit by a vehicle. Several instances of coyote aggression toward humans have occurred here, including a few attacks.

Park staff scare unwary coyotes from visitor-use areas with cracker-shell rounds, bear repellent spray, or other negative stimuli. Animals that continue to pose a threat to themselves or to humans are killed. Signs, interpretive brochures, and park staff continue to remind visitors that coyotes and other park wildlife are wild and potentially dangerous and should never be fed or approached.

