

# COYOTE

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#002 Rangeland Wildlife Factsheet Series

## The Controversial Canine



**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Canis latrans*

**SYNONYMS:** American jackal, prairie wolf and brush wolf

**HABITAT:** All habitats, including urban areas

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:** dog or wolf-like, mixture of browns, grays, whites and even black, large triangle-shaped ears, long slender muzzle, bushy tail

**WEIGHT:** average of 20-35 lbs

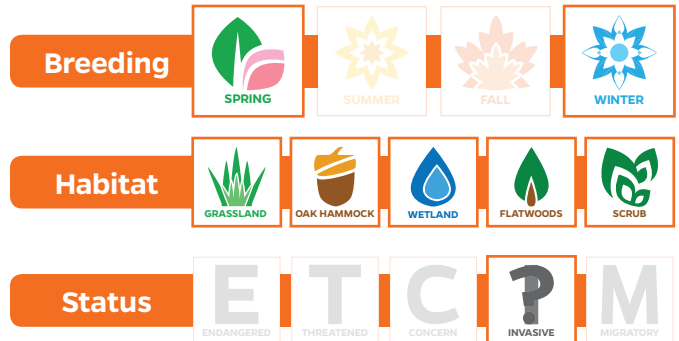
**DEMOGRAPHIC RATE:** 2 month gestation, female in heat annually, average 6 pups/litter

**LIFESPAN:** 5-6 years in the wild, oldest reported coyote in captivity 18-19 y/old and in the wild about 12 y/old

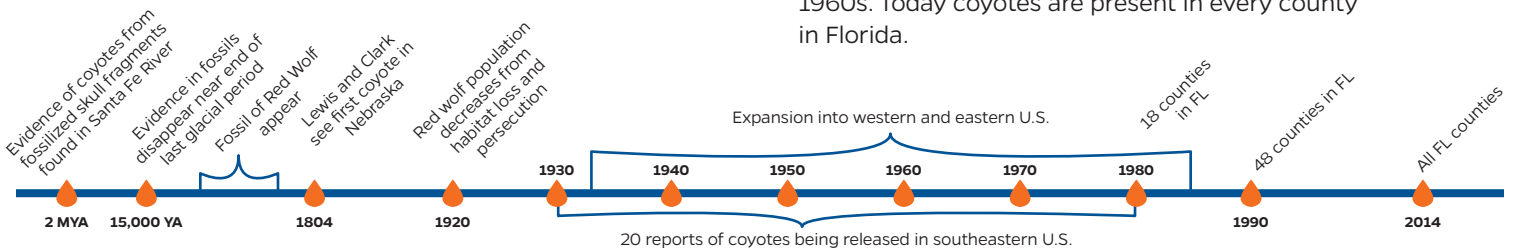
**DISPERSAL:** Pups may disperse from pack when 8-10 months old depending on rank and availability of food resources, however some remain with the pack or disperse after first year.

### Did you know?

Coyotes were originally predators of the Great Plains and expanded but have now expanded through out North America.



**HISTORY:** The earliest sign of coyotes in Florida is from fossilized skull fragments dating from the late Pliocene. Near the end of the last glacial period fossil records of a large wolf and coyote species disappeared from eastern North America. This also coincides with the period when humans started to inhabit North America and the first fossil records of the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) appear. Coyotes expanded from the Great Plains in the 1940s. Two major factors may be attributed to their expansion. The eradication of the red wolf which reduced competition pressure and human alteration of the landscape for agricultural use opened up preferred rangeland habitat used by coyotes. In Florida, reports of coyotes being released or escaping date back to the 1930s, however coyotes did not expand into Florida until around the 1960s. Today coyotes are present in every county in Florida.



# COYOTE FAST FACTS

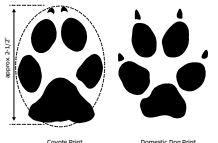
- Eastern coyotes larger, possibly due to hybridization with wolves
- Keen sense of hearing, vision and smell
- Crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk and nocturnal
- Can be a threat to livestock and small pets



Courtesy of The National Wildlife Federation

**DISTRIBUTION:** Coyotes are now present in most of North America, with their upper limit in northern Canada and Alaska and lower limit around Panama. Within the last decade, many researchers and ranchers suggest that their populations have continued to increase. Two recent studies in south-central Florida found average home range areas of 10-14 mi<sup>2</sup>, while core home range areas were around 1-2 mi<sup>2</sup> and one roaming coyote was found to cover 350 mi<sup>2</sup> within 150 days.

## Tracks



**BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR:** Coyotes are members of the dog family (Canidae) and are habitat generalists, meaning they will use almost all habitats, including urban areas and beaches. Coyotes are opportunistic omnivores consuming a variety of animals (small reptiles, rabbits, insects, deer, feral cats, carrion, and eggs) and plants (grasses, watermelon, berries). Coyotes may be found alone, as a breeding pair or even in small groups depending on habitat and food resources. Coyotes are social, vocalizing with yips, barks, and howls. Coyotes breed once a year in winter and are sexually mature within one year. Both parents care for the young and dens are typically found in burrows, hollow logs, or dense vegetation. There is some evidence of density dependent reproduction with smaller litter sizes as the coyote population in an area increases.

**IMPACTS:** There are varying perspectives on coyotes as their range continues to expand, often into urban areas. Some view coyotes as part of Florida's natural wildlife, while others view coyotes as invasive pests that are preying on livestock, pets, and wildlife. One of the greatest conflicts is coyote predation on livestock. Coyotes have been known to injure or kill sheep, goats, calves, poultry, and hogs, as well as eat agricultural crops. Coyotes typically attack the neck of an animal and signs of coyote attack include bite marks, bruises and bleeding around the head, neck and ears, as well as wounds to the hind legs and tails of livestock. Coyote tracks and droppings may not indicate an attack, only presence, and it may be that coyotes are only scavenging after death from other causes. How often coyotes are truly to blame for livestock loss is an important question that researchers are currently trying to answer. Coyotes can also attack small pets especially in the urban interface. Coyotes have been suggested to compete with similar sized predator species, such as bobcats and foxes, but so far data does not support this. Coyotes have also been known to depredate ground-nesting bird eggs and sea turtle eggs. Attacks on humans are extremely rare.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Learn about your local coyote control laws. Visit <http://myfwc.com>
- Protect your pets by keeping them indoors or in a fenced area.
- Reduce urban conflicts by securing garbage cans.
- Investigate methods to protect your livestock, such as guard donkeys and dogs and exclusion fencing.

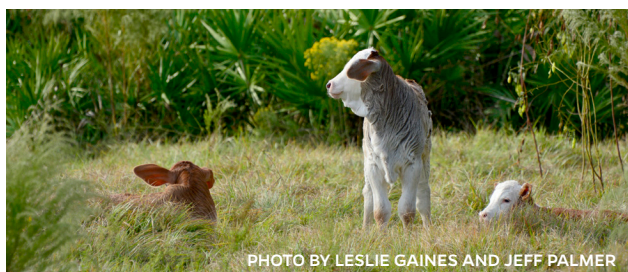


PHOTO BY LESLIE GAINES AND JEFF PALMER

To learn more see these factsheets at [www.rangelandwildlife.com](http://www.rangelandwildlife.com) and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

- Managing Conflicts with Wildlife: Living with Coyotes
- Interpreting the Physical Evidence of Predation on Domestic Livestock