

# Coyotes Roam the Streets of Tucson: How to Keep Your Pets Safe

By Lisa K. Harris, Ph.D



“Cat Missing” reads the sign posted on the telephone pole. This message communicates more than just to be on the lookout for a beloved lost pet — it means that there are probably coyotes in the neighborhood. You may not realize that coyotes exist in mid-town Tucson. You might possibly consider the idea another urban myth. You may believe instead, that coyotes live only in the outlying desert, or if they do live in urban areas, that their presence is limited to washes or parks, or that they are “just passing through.”

Not so. A recent study conducted by the School of Natural Resources at the University of Arizona and Arizona Game and Fish Department shows that coyotes inhabit our neighborhoods. They live under sheds, in bushes and culverts, and they carry off our cats and dogs. Roads do not deter their movement, even busy roads such as Campbell Avenue or Broadway Boulevard.

Scientists conducted a study of radio-collared animals near Broadway and Country Club, and the results showed that coyotes roam the city. The average size of their home range was 15 square miles.

“They are most active at night, but are opportunistic. If food is available, they will eat anytime,” says Elissa Ostegaard, Urban Wildlife Specialist for Arizona Game and Fish. “They eat figs, mesquite pods, rodents, house cats, rabbits, squirrels, pet food and small dogs.” Ostegaard defines a small dog as one weighing less than 15 pounds.

“No one knows how many coyotes live in Tucson,” says Paul Krausman, Professor of Wildlife Conservation and Management at the School of Natural Resources, University of Arizona; and principal investigator of the Tucson urban coyote study, “but they are here to stay.” According to Krausman, coyotes are very adaptable to urban areas. “They eat a wide variety of food, find shelter in any undisturbed and quiet spot, and drink water from swimming pools and drip irrigation.”

And don’t think that if one dies, there is one less coyote in Tucson. “If an urban coyote is killed or removed from its territory, another will take its place,” Krausman says. “An animal will move in from the surrounding desert and urban fringe areas.”

Shannon Grubbs, a graduate student working with Krausman, tracked the radio-collared coyotes for a year. Her research found that they typically traveled alone or in pairs and sometimes in groups of four or six. Grubbs learned that the radio-collared animals returned to their Broadway/Country Club neighborhood by dawn, after spending the night hours hunting.

“Coyotes are attracted to other dogs,” Grubbs says. On several occasions, she saw coyotes approach leashed dogs and sniff them. In other instances, coyotes ran back and forth alongside fenced dog enclosures, as if playing with or taunting the dogs. She has also seen coyotes chase mid-sized dogs.

To make your home inhospitable to coyotes, Ostegaard suggests “removing fruit from trees, not leaving pet food containers outside, and

when you see a coyote, scare it away with loud noises or by throwing pebbles.” Both Krausman and Ostegaard recommend never purposely feeding a coyote.

“Pet owners should always accompany their pets outside,” says Sasha Alexander, a dog trainer and owner of Paw Prints Pet Services, “even if the yard is enclosed.” Coyotes have been known to scale six-foot-tall block walls and snatch pets, sometimes while their horrified owners watched.


“Dog owners should make themselves visible to possible predators, not just sit on the porch while Fido does his business,” says Alexander. If possible, construct a covered, completely enclosed, snake-proof dog run. “That way dogs can be outside on their own,” Alexander adds. Another solution to prevent coyotes from entering an enclosed yard is to construct a roll-bar on top of the fence or block wall. “When walking a dog, always have the dog on a leash, and if you spot a coyote, hold your dog, while trying to scare the animal away,” Alexander advises.

To cut down on coyotes in the neighborhood, “Neighbors should band together, meet and discuss the situation, and develop a plan.” Krausman says, “Do everything to discourage the animals, from keeping yards clear of potential food and keeping house cats inside, to actively making loud noises when neighbors spot animals while walking on streets.”

#### What to do when you see a coyote:

- Make loud noises to frighten the coyote away.
- Pick up and hold small to mid-sized dogs.
- Throw rocks or sticks to frighten the coyote away.
- Never approach a coyote.
- Never feed coyote.
- Never leave your dog unattended.

Arizona Game and Fish Department will meet with neighbors and discuss how to live with urban wildlife, including coyotes.

For more information on urban coyotes, visit Arizona Game and Fish’s website at [www.gf.state.az.us](http://www.gf.state.az.us) and search for the “Living with Coyotes” page. 

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