All About Coyotes

All About Coyotes will introduce you to the fascinating world of coyotes. This book uses pictures and sounds to describe the different aspects of a coyote's life, including appearance, family life, habitat, diet, and forms of communication. This book will also help you tell the difference between the facts and myths about coyotes.

Coyotes and their Families

When most people think of coyotes, they often associate them with dogs or wolves. In fact, coyotes, dogs and wolves are all part of the same family. Each type of animal has special traits that make them unique. Coyotes have many fascinating characteristics that make them fun to study.

This photo shows a coyote standing in snow. The coyote has a pointed nose,
pointed ears, and light and dark brown fur.

This photo shows a black Labrador, a type of dog. This dog has ears that hang down to the side of its head, and its fur is shiny and black.

This photo shows a wolf standing in snow. The wolf has a long, pointed nose; pointed ears; large paws; and gray and tan fur.

Photo of a coyote with a thick winter coat. It is standing in snow.

Coyotes are fairly small animals, weighing between 20 and 50 pounds. They are about the size of a Collie dog. Their fur is tan- or gray-colored, and some coyotes have white bellies. Coyotes that live in cold climates grow thick fur coats in the winter to protect them from the cold.
This photo shows the entrance to a coyote den hidden at the base of a hill. The coyote den is a hole in the hillside which is surrounded by grass.

Coyotes usually live in sheltered areas. They live in dens only when a female is giving birth or when there is bad weather. The dens can be made out of old badger or fox holes, or hollows in the side of rocky ledges.

This photo shows three coyote pups with their front paws on a tree root. The pups are looking intently at something to the right.

Coyotes live in packs that usually have between 3 and 8 members. The pack travels together and shares food. When a female coyote gives birth to her pups, she will go into a den alone. A litter is usually between 6 and 8 pups. Females birth a litter almost every year!

This photo shows four small, gray mice huddled together on grass and leaves.
Coyotes are opportunistic animals. This means that they take advantage of any food they can find. A normal coyote's diet includes rabbits, mice, birds, and most other wild animals. Although they live in packs, coyotes like to hunt alone. When hunting, they can run up to 40 miles per hour. Coyotes are omnivores, so they will also eat all kinds of fruits and vegetables. However, when their food supply is low, coyotes will wander into urban areas to look for food. A starving coyote will eat garbage, garden vegetables, and even small pets.

This photo shows a tomato plant with tomatoes ripening on it. Some tomatoes are red, while others are just turning pink.

Habitats

This map shows the range of coyotes today and 50 years ago. The territory that coyotes live in today covers most of North and Central America. This area is bigger than it was 50 years ago.

Coyotes are one of the most adaptable animals in the world. It used to be that coyotes were mostly found in the northwestern United States. Coyotes can
now be found in every part of North America, and some parts of Central America. Because they can adjust their eating habits, breeding patterns, and social behavior, coyotes can survive in almost any habitat.

This photo shows a coyote at the entrance to its den. Just its head is showing outside the den.

Most coyotes live on open prairies and in brushy areas. They sleep out in the open unless the weather is bad or they are being chased. In these cases, coyotes will retreat to their dens, which are usually hidden from sight. The only other time these dens are used is when a mother is giving birth to pups.

This photo shows a coyote walking in open grasslands. The coyote's fur color blends in well with the surrounding tan and brown grass.

Although coyotes can live in just about any climate, they are mostly found in areas with open grasslands and low elevations. They tend to stay within 10 to 12 miles of their den. When food is scarce, coyotes will travel well beyond this range.
This photo shows a coyote sitting in a parking lot. The coyote appears relaxed in this human environment.

Coyotes adapt to the environment around them. This means that coyotes sometimes have to learn to co-exist with human beings. Coyotes adjust well to living in urban areas. They find food by scavenging in garbage cans and hunting other urban animals such as raccoons and opossums. Since coyotes can be dangerous, humans must be careful to keep coyotes away from their homes. This means covering garbage cans tightly, bringing small pets inside at night, and fencing in their yards.

Communication

This photo shows a coyote standing on a rock. The coyote has its head tilted back and its mouth open wide, howling toward the sky.

Coyotes have many ways of communicating with each other and with other animals. Their most familiar form of communication is vocalization, or making
different sounds. Many other animals communicate through vocalization: dogs bark when they feel threatened; cats purr when they are content; birds chirp and sing to attract other birds. Coyotes use four different types of sounds to communicate: howling, barking, yelping, and huffing.

Howling is the coyote sound that is most commonly heard. Coyotes howl to "talk" to other coyotes in the area. The howl lets other coyotes know where they are. It also helps to reunite separated members of the pack. The howl is a high-pitched, eerie noise. It is usually heard at night. Sometimes, other coyotes will join in the howling.

When young coyotes are playing with one another, they yelp to express excitement or to give a warning. Yelps are short, high-pitched noises.

Coyotes bark when they are trying to protect themselves or their families. The bark is a warning noise. It tells enemies to stay away. It sounds similar to a
The final type of vocalization that coyotes use is called huffing. This is a low-pitched, quiet noise. Female coyotes use it to call their pups.

In addition to vocalization, coyotes communicate with each other and with other animals by "marking their territory." They do this by making a border with urine or "scat" (droppings). By marking an area with urine or scat, a pack of coyotes can claim an area as its own. Neighboring packs are hesitant to cross into "marked" territory.

Fact or Fiction?

This photo shows a coyote crouching low, ready to pounce on a nearby mouse.

Native American folklore is filled with tales of the "trickster" coyote, like How Coyote Stole Fire. The coyote earned a reputation for being a sly, sneaky predator. Stories of his adventures have been re-told for hundreds of years. As a result, it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between "coyote fact" and "coyote fiction." Here are some common myths about coyotes--and some facts to help you decide whether or not they are true.

One coyote myth is that coyotes sometimes hunt human beings. This is fiction! Coyotes do not hunt human beings. In fact, coyotes are likely to be more scared of us than we are of them. They are naturally shy animals. Coyotes will only attack when they feel frightened. If you run into a coyote that comes too close, the best thing to do is stand as tall as possible, wave your arms, and make a lot of noise. Usually the coyote will run away.
Another myth about coyotes is that they always steal and eat livestock. Farmers are often anxious about coyotes attacking their animals, so they set traps and put up fences to keep them away. Many times, coyotes are blamed for damage done by dogs. In fact, coyotes rarely eat livestock unless they are injured or starving, and lacking other food to eat. Coyotes that live close to humans may struggle to find enough food in the wild. If they come across a food source such as livestock, they will attack.

Coyotes earned their place in folklore because they are smart, secretive animals. However, they can be dangerous. Human beings should never feed coyotes, or encourage them to approach. The more comfortable they get around people, the more likely coyotes are to attack. They might look similar to dogs, but coyotes should never be treated as pets. Coyotes are necessary creatures to the balance of nature. We can appreciate and respect them as beautiful, wild animals.

Coyotes and Other Animals

The first sentence tells us that people often associate coyotes with dogs or wolves. Although they are all part of the same family, each has a unique set of traits. Choose an animal you think is similar to a coyote, and search the Internet for information about the animal you chose. Compare what you learn to what you know about coyotes. How are the two animals alike? How are they different? Write a description, present to the class, or share with a friend.

Friends or Foes?

Coyotes adapt to the environment around them. Today, coyotes live closer to people than ever before. People have chosen the coyote as the mascot of some schools and as a state animal of South Dakota. Do you think coyotes are friends or foes of humans? You might want to do some research to help you answer this question. On your own or with a group, write down some facts that support your opinion. Then present your argument to the class. Make
sure to share the reasons why you think coyotes are humans' friends or foes. Try to convince your classmates of your view.

Animals Communicate

Different animals communicate in a different ways. In this text, you've learned about some of the ways that coyotes communicate with each other. Go back and listen again to the coyotes' howl, yelp, bark, and huff. Then listen to a dog's bark and a wolf's howl. Can you tell the difference between these sounds and the coyote sounds?

Search the Internet for information about how other kinds of animals or insects communicate with members of their species. How are these methods of communication similar to and different from human communication? You might start by visiting the following web pages to learn some facts about animal communication and download clips of animal sounds. Remember that sound is not the only signal animals use to communicate!

http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0768578.html
http://www.animal-sounds.org/index.html