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Dec 16 2019

Coyotes are here to stay in New Orleans

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Featured, public safety

Coyotes sighted on Octavia Street in Broadmoor area.



By Sue Strachan, Uptown Messenger

After his vehicle was broken into, Tracy Wimberly purchased on Mother’s Day 2019 a Ring camera for security. But it wasn’t car thieves that Wimberly caught on video.

It was coyotes.

“As soon as I installed the camera,” said Wimberly, “I started seeing them.” He hadn’t realized they were around before.

A resident of the 3000 block of Octavia Street, his neighborhood has had a cluster of recent coyotes sightings.

Wimberly said he sees typically a pair of coyotes – one that is black, the other a mixed tan colored – that travel together, with the mixed tan colored one occasionally by itself.

“I don’t seen them every night,” Wimberly said. “We usually see the pair once week,” with a periodic sighting of the mixed tan-colored one running solo, though Wimberly doesn’t know if it is a different coyote or is one of the pair.

“They run past the house and hardly even stop,” noting that they don’t come back past his house for a return trip. “They never stalk or hunt, just traveling at a good pace,” he said, “usually around 3 a.m. to 4 a.m. in the morning.”

Wimberly joins a number of New Orleanians who are becoming more aware of coyotes and whose close encounters with them are more frequent.

Rise of the coyote

Coyotes were mainly found in the U.S. West, but as certain factors came into play – eradication of their predators, the fragmentation of woodland in the eastern and southeastern U.S. and the expansion of where people lived – coyotes began to enlarge their range, appearing in Louisiana in the 1950s.

What is said around New Orleans is that coyotes came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Wildlife mitigation specialist John Schmidt, better known by the name Trapper John, scoffed at that notion. “Katrina killed coyotes,” he said. “It had nothing to do with that.”

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He thinks coyotes are relatively new to the area; they have been around for a little less than 20 years.

As coyotes increased their territory into New Orleans, they adapted to an urban landscape and into a hot topic with concerned citizens reporting sightings and incidents on online forums such as Nextdoor or neighborhood Facebook pages. On Aug. 1, there was a City Council committee meeting with District B Councilman Jay Banks to discuss concerns.

Official response: It's the public's problem

Most sightings take place at night, but coyotes can also be active during the day.

Melissa Collins, a wildlife biologist with Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries said, "Just because you see a coyote, it isn't necessarily looking for food, it may be heading to a den site, a resting place, or just on a path to get from point A to B."

What can a concerned homeowner do about getting rid of a coyote? (Hint: You have to pay for it.)

Neither the LA/SPCA nor the city – not even the state, unless it is a special circumstance – will get rid of coyotes.

The LA/SPCA does not handle coyotes or wildlife, stated Alicia Vial, communications director for the organization, in an email.

A City Hall spokesperson stated in an email: "The City nor Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries provide nuisance animal control or removal services."

The Wildlife & Fisheries website does have a list of more than 100 statewide nuisance wildlife control operators – Trapper John is on it — that residents can contact to get rid of coyotes. Even though the trappers are approved by the state to do this, it does not pay for the service. The person who hires the trapper has to pay them.

The only time the state will come out to remove a coyote is when they believe there is a "biological concern," said Collins.

The state has no idea how many coyotes there are in New Orleans, or even Louisiana, and according to Collins, she is not aware of any state project to study coyotes being pushed forward.

Trapper John agrees that no one knows how many there are in Louisiana. He does say that Uptown is not overrun with coyotes, and that people are most likely seeing the same ones.

"In cities, their ranges are not that large, so probably an average five-mile radius," said Collins.

Trapper John was recently hired to get rid of six coyotes — a mom, dad and four pups – in the Lower Garden District. He snared three of the pups, caught a pup in a foothold trap, and then took them elsewhere to kill them. But the parents and the other pup remain.

Take precautions

If you encounter a coyote, Collins said, you need to stand your ground and not walk away. "Holler at them, wave arms at them, throw something," she said, adding that these tips can be found on the [Wildlife & Fisheries website](#). More information is available from the [Coyote Research Project](#).

Also on the Wildlife & Fisheries site is a list of steps people can take to mitigate nuisance wildlife in their lives. If you don't want coyotes around your yard, don't supply anything they could use for food or for shelter. Here are some precautions supplied by Wildlife & Fisheries:

1. Make sure food for wildlife is not available around your home.
 - a. Never feed wild animals.
 - b. Make sure no pet food is left out at night
 - c. Secure trashcan lids and compost heaps.

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 Sewerage and Water Board
 Annunciation parks and greenspace
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d. Do not leave domestic animals that may be potential prey items loose or in shoddy or weak shelters.

2. Eliminate areas that can possible be used by wildlife as a shelter.

a. Seal any holes that may give wildlife access to your attic or interior of your home.

b. Chicken wire or lattice can be used under raised houses to keep them out.

c. Keep grass mowed to eliminate cover for wildlife.

d. Eliminate piles of wood or debris that can be used as shelter.

Coyotes will be coyotes

For local homeowners, these precautions are essential, but don't always work.

Coyotes are omnivores, and the city provides a good territory to live in. They thrive on food sources chickens and other birds — as well as pets such as cats and small dogs. They get their vegetables and fruit from trash, compost and gardens.

Tracey Davenport, who lives on one acre in Chalmette with her husband, had 21 chickens and four ducks. She and her husband now have one chicken.

Davenport, who started seeing coyotes in 2016, admits that the deaths aren't all coyotes — she had one chicken survive an attack by a raccoon.

It was about six months ago in the middle of the night when Davenport came face to face with a pack of coyotes, which ended up killing her ducks. Because her land borders the levee, she theorizes the high river forced them out from the other side of the batture to hunt.

Their chicken coop is locked up at night, but even then, chickens would disappear when they were roaming around during the day. Three months ago, she thinks coyotes managed to break into the coop and kill most of her chickens.

And while Davenport realizes that coyotes are part of living in the country, losing her animals is painful.

It is a sentiment echoed by Tracy Wimberly, who says he understands their place in the ecosystem.

However, as the owner of an indoor and outdoor cat, which he says doesn't go too far from the house, it will be a different story if the coyotes attack his cat.

Reporter Sue Strachan can be reached at sustrachan16@gmail.com.

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