



FEATURES



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Nature News: Sharing The Landscape With Coyotes



Coyotes are most active at dawn and dusk. Photo by Christine Barton

By Angela McLaughlin - Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Apr 19, 2018

"The last word in ignorance is the man who says of the animal, 'What good is it?'"
— Aldo Leopold, conservationist, forester, and author of "Land Ethic"

Life in the backcountry is full of beauty, open spaces and wildlife.

Living in close proximity to wildlife has its blessings and curses, but learning more about the fascinating creatures that we share our landscape with may help us appreciate it even more.

One critter commonly found on the landscape is the coyote. An iconic symbol of the Southwest, it is an animal that has been feared, vilified and persecuted for

more than a hundred years. Often portrayed as a "trickster" in Native American mythology, this interesting canid has also been referred to as a "prairie dog" or "prairie wolf."

Though they continue to battle a negative public image, coyotes have learned to adapt and thrive on a changing landscape. And as humans find themselves living in a closer vicinity to them, we are learning just how beneficial they are to the ecosystem.

As an opportunistic feeder, coyotes both hunt and scavenge for food.

And they are not strict carnivores, as they will consume rotten fruit and vegetables, among other things.

Christine Barton, Director of Operations at the Fund for Animals Wildlife Center, says the main food source for coyotes in our area is field mice. They consume small rodents such as mice, gophers, voles and ground squirrels — animals that may cause destruction to a garden or home.

In addition to keeping the populations of prey animals under control, Keli Hendricks, Ranching with Wildlife Coordinator for Project Coyote, says they also help contain the spread of diseases, such as chronic wasting disease, hantaviruses and Lyme disease.

But they were not always so appreciated. As a target of anti-predator campaigns that began in the early 1900s, coyotes battled a mindset of "the only good predator is a dead one." Somehow, they persevered through a movement that almost entirely wiped out wolves, mountain lions and other large predators. But it came at the cost of millions of coyote lives.

Hendricks shared the story of what happened in Kern County, California, when by 1927, the entire farming community was devoid of coyotes and other predators.

"Nature finally fought back," says Hendricks. "The county came under siege by millions of rodents.

Populations were estimated at millions of mice per acre of land. The mice, without natural predators to control their numbers, devastated crops and invaded homes. It was the single greatest rodent invasion in U.S. history."

Barton adds that when predators are allowed on the terrain, the result is a healthier landscape.

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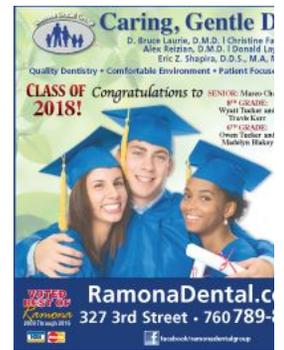
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