

# LIVING WITH COYOTES

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Coyotes are one of the newest additions to the fauna of Seabrook Island. We have had occasional reports of coyote sightings over the past decade, mostly single transient animals. Reports from homeowners this year indicate that we have likely had a litter produced on our island, something that has rarely occurred in the past.

So where did coyotes come from and why are we suddenly seeing them? Our ancestors extirpated the original apex predators (red wolves and mountain lions) in this region by the late 1800s. This opened a habitat for a large land predator. Coyotes were originally found in the western prairies but the highly adaptable canid gradually extended their range eastward as they found suitable habitat, abundant prey, and limited competition. Transient coyotes first appeared in the mid-

Atlantic region around 1980. Populations grew slowly at first but exploded in the late 1900s and early 2000s. Since then, they have moved into almost all suitable habitat in the east - Seabrook Island being one of the last.

Most people view coyotes as a threat but this is rarely the case, since they are very wary of humans. Even in areas where coyote populations are high, they are rarely observed. Preferred prey includes rodents, squirrels, rabbits, and fawns. However, they can be a threat to small dogs and cats that are allowed to range free. The average coyote only weighs 25-35 pounds, so is unlikely to attack a 70 pound lab. Any impact they might have on other wildlife would likely be viewed as positive by most homeowners and naturalists. They could lower the population of rodents and may provide some limited natural control of our deer herd.

The typical home range for coyotes is about 10 square miles - larger than the size of Seabrook Island. This would explain why we see them some years while not in others. It is hard to predict whether the pair that raised pups on the island this year will den here again next year. The pups will disperse in the fall and winter to other areas as they are run off by the dominant adults. Because of the large home range of coyotes, the carrying capacity of Seabrook Island will limit the population to a couple of adults and, likely, not more than one family group.

For those who fear coyotes and would like to see them eliminated, it's difficult and unproductive to do so. Since coyotes range so far, removal of an animal will general just result in another moving in. Removal of a resident individual that is not causing problems could result in a new individual that is much worse. It is well documented that reducing coyote population results in increased reproduction the following year. Certainly, if an individual coyote becomes aggressive towards pets or people, we will have it removed - much as we do with alligators. However, most coyotes do not pose a problem and we can enjoy the opportunity to occasionally glimpse or more frequently hear the vocalizations of our newest resident.

*If you would like to report wildlife, please do so [here](#) on SIPOA's Wildlife Sightings Map.*