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## AUDUBON'S PERSPECTIVE ON COYOTES

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*National Audubon Society*

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## AUDUBON'S PERSPECTIVE ON COYOTES

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### **The National Audubon Society**

The National Audubon Society is a charitable, non-profit citizens' scientific and education organization. We were formed in the early 1900s as a coalition of independent outdoor nature groups who banded together to conserve many species of birds which were being destroyed by an unregulated market on meat and feathers.

In 1904, feathers from some of the long legged wading birds were literally worth their weight in gold: \$32.00 an ounce. As a consequence of the high price, no education programs, and no regulatory apparatus, parent birds were being hunted year round, including when they had young in their nests. Especially during nesting seasons they were easy prey because of their reluctance to leave their young. Nesting colonies of birds were rapidly destroyed.

By hunting nesting birds, the profiteers of the feather trade were inadvertently, but seriously affecting the likelihood that subsequent generations of those species would survive.

The Audubon Society used 4 tactics in its campaign to protect long legged wading birds from the plume trade. First, they used education and publicity; publishing notes, articles, editorials, ads, and poems; giving speeches, taking decision makers and opinion leaders to the sites of concern. Second, they used land stewardship, buying important roosting sites or informing coastal states of the importance of coastal nesting sites when sites were publicly owned. Third, they used market pressures, urging consumers not to buy products that hastened the extinction of the beautiful bird species of concern. Finally, they used legislation to provide a regulatory apparatus of protection.

The wild bird plume trade has been gone from the United States since the early 1900s. Decorative feathers now come from domestic or pen-raised

birds and have for almost a century. The egrets, spoonbills, and herons, once in such peril, recovered and provide Texans and millions of tourists with thrilling sights along the Texas coast and elsewhere.

### **The Audubon member**

Audubon members are still outdoor nature enthusiasts. They spend a lot of time in the field. They are active outdoor people who supplement what they see with studies and readings in areas of interest to them.

Our average member is in his/her early 40s, has a few years of college past a Bachelor's degree, has a combined household income just over \$60,000, and is active in church and/or a civic organization in addition to Audubon. In Texas, 20% of our members are rural or in small towns. The rest reside in or near one of Texas' major municipalities.

### **Audubon staff**

Audubon's staff in the Southwest are predominantly young adults with middle-aged supervisors. Professional staff have a Master's Degree or higher. Most are only one generation (or less) removed from a farm or ranch background. The new president of the National Audubon Society grew up on a dairy farm in Minnesota. Many staff are still engaged in agriculture. I raise Angora goats and my partner and I are among very few Texas certified organic peach growers. I came from a family which was agrarian on both sides until my parents' adult lives. Most of my peers in the mainstream environmental community in Texas have similar backgrounds.

### **How Audubon views coyotes**

Audubon has a membership which probably spans all views of coyotes (*Canis latrans*). Audubon's staff views coyotes as biologically appropriate predators in most of the Southwest. We believe that they can be an asset to a well-managed ranch, but that they can also cause localized depredation which must be answered.

Our members value predators, including coyotes, for their natural role in ecological systems, including their influence on prey species. Many of our members travel broadly and spend money to view wildlife, and consider it a treat to see and hear coyotes.

### **Politics and coyotes**

The points that I would like to address relative to this predator's politics include both real and perceived problems. A general outline to my discussion is attached (Table 1)

**Table 1. An outline of political issues related to coyotes.**

- 
- I. People's perceptions of coyotes
    - A. What gives value to wildlife (or anything)
      1. Market system (what's it worth?)
      2. Economic value of coyotes
        - a. Ecotourism
        - b. Film & photographs
        - c. Elimination of competitors for range resources
        - d. Fur
        - e. Souvenirs
      3. Totem value of coyotes
        - a. Romantic symbol of wild west
        - b. Symbolic of cleverness and resourcefulness
        - c. Symbolic of the beleaguered but unconquered
        - d. Value by rarity
          - (1) Hard to see
          - (2) Perceived to be diminishing
          - (3) Perceived to be disappearing (i.e., "*can't do it now, but soon will be able to*")
      4. Valued for perceived "place" in the system
        - a. "Place" is dynamic, but often not perceived as such
        - b. Valued because it is "owned" in common
  - II. Political versus biological decisions
    - A. Do coyotes deserve the expenditures to control them?
      1. Should those expenditures be borne by the general public?
    - B. Do coyotes deserve the energy to protect them?
    - C. Are there vigorous efforts to eliminate/protect them?
  - III. Topical political issues related to coyotes
    - A. Coyotes are publicly-owned resources (issues of public responsibility as well as public rights)
    - B. Coyotes may affect privately-owned resources (adversely or positively)
    - C. Coyote control may impact other publicly-owned resources (e.g., other wildlife, water quality, safety, local, state and national budgets)
    - D. Coyotes may be scapegoats for other problems (e.g., other sources of mortality and economic woes beyond the control of the producer)
  - IV. Perception issues with coyotes
    - A. Perception is reality
    - B. Depredation disagreements in perception
      1. Whether there is depredation by coyotes or not
      2. Degree of depredation
      3. Significance of depredation (mortality versus compensatory mortality)
      4. Degree of responsibility for the depredation
        - (a) To be borne by the producer/ public
    - C. Which control is appropriate
      1. Prophylactic versus reactive
      2. Lethal versus non-lethal)
    - D. Degree to which control is possible
      1. Importance in its niche (biological)
      2. Importance as a totem (social)
    - E. Bias in data
      1. Data collection is political
      2. Data interpretation is political