

URBAN COYOTES: SOME SUMMARY THOUGHTS

JEFFREY S. GREEN, USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services, Fort Collins, CO, USA

Abstract: The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services program provides services on request to help alleviate damage by wildlife to agriculture, natural resources and human health and safety. Such services may also involve dealing with coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in urban settings. Resolving problems with urban coyotes requires a mix of suitable methods but perhaps more importantly, an understanding of complex social and cultural issues surrounding people and wildlife.

Key words: *Canis latrans*, coyote, grizzly bear urban coyotes, wildlife damage, Wildlife Services,

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Numerous references were made today, some accompanied by sobering photographs, of coyotes attacking and injuring people, pets and property in urban settings. It is ironic that I received a news clip on my Blackberry during today's session:

Grizzly bear attacks man in Teton County, 50 feet from his home

Rocky Barker and Patrick Orr - Idaho Statesman

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A grizzly bear attacked a man Tuesday night outside of Teton in Teton County. The 33 year-old man was walking outside his home looking for his dog that was barking when the bear attacked him. He was only 50 feet away from his home, said Teton County Sheriff Kim Cook. He was flown by helicopter to Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center in Idaho Falls where he is in stable condition. Idaho Department of Fish and Game officials said they have laid traps and were working with the sheriff to get the bear. "After the well being of the victim the safety of the public is our top concern," said

Jon Heggen, Fish and Game's chief of enforcement.

This grizzly attack happened yesterday, and incidents such as this with large and potentially dangerous predators appear to be increasing in frequency across this country. Indeed, we all heard today about last week's attack on a child by a coyote in New Jersey. This daylong session on urban coyotes is timely and on target.

Today we have heard much about coyotes and their interactions with people in urban settings. The focus today has been on the problems and how to deal with them. There are no easy or universal answers; no "silver bullets" were revealed today. We have heard how various municipalities have tried to deal with urban coyotes. Wildlife managers are working under varying restrictions that are purportedly supported by the majority of the public that is being served. We heard that "people in Austin, TX don't want to kill anything" while people in Green Valley, AZ are not opposed to having a problem coyote shot in their community. Citizens and even school children in Vancouver, B.C. are being taught

how to harass coyotes (e.g., yelling, throwing rocks). We heard one researcher today who opined that "coyotes are currently the most controversial carnivore in North American urban settings." So we have real problems and no clear cut solutions, a true challenge to citizens, city officials, wildlife managers and researchers.

My personal research experience with coyotes began some three decades ago with the Agricultural Research Service and focused on how to protect sheep from being preyed on by coyotes. This is still a problem for the livestock industry but advances have been made in addressing it. By contrast, the problems posed by urban coyotes were relatively few and far between three decades ago. This is not so today, as we have clearly heard.

My assignment in this session was to offer thoughts from the agency or federal perspective. Wildlife Services (WS) is a federal program within United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service that provides assistance when wildlife damages agriculture, natural resources or threatens human health and safety. Wildlife Specialists from WS provide services only upon request, within the context of authorizing legislation and under written formal agreements. They provide everything from technical assistance (i.e., verbal or written advice on dealing with a problem) to actually conducting work (i.e., direct control). In general, WS is a cost-share program and in the Western Region, approximately one half of the funds come from Federal appropriations and the other half from the cooperators. However, in many instances, cooperators pay most or all of the costs for services. The WS program will continue to provide services using the most appropriate and up-to-date methods available.

We have heard much today about "educating the public" about issues surrounding managing urban coyote problems. In years past, I also thought this of paramount importance. At the least, people should have accurate information for as Mark Twain said, "What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know, it's what we know for sure that just ain't so." We should persist in providing accurate information to people who choose to be informed. Nevertheless, I am thinking more and more that for many people, the facts might not matter very much. Writer and diarist, Anais Nin insightfully said, "We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are." I believe this is true. In the end, we might not need so much more research as the need to do a better job of communicating, understanding, and working collaboratively. Some people might not care so much about the facts, the data, but more so about how they feel about an issue. If a person's own ox is getting gored, they probably have a different perspective than someone who lives miles away and has not had a personal experience with urban coyotes.

A thought expressed in yesterday's session and attributed to Ed Bangs, Wolf Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Montana, was that "if wolves are near livestock, they will sooner or later kill livestock." I believe the same line of thinking can be applied to urban coyotes. When coyotes are allowed to persist in urban areas, there will be problems with them and people. Our collective challenge is to thoughtfully and effectively deal with the problems, a difficult task at best. Sharing information today has been fruitful and more such occasions in the future will add to our understanding and hopefully, our success.