



Coyotes in the Presidio Frequently Asked Questions (updated August 2015)

Why are coyotes living in San Francisco and the Presidio?

Coyotes are adaptable and often live in or near urban areas. They are seen throughout San Francisco and live in most large city parks. The Presidio offers good habitat for coyotes due to its wild food sources, water sources, and green open space. Coyotes feed primarily on rodents and play a valuable role in the Presidio's diverse ecosystem, primarily through natural pest control.

Have they always been here? Why did they leave?

Coyotes were historically found throughout the Bay Area due to the abundance of habitat, food, and water. As San Francisco grew, coyotes were pushed out. The last coyote recorded in the city in the 20th century was seen in 1925 in Golden Gate Park. In addition to loss of habitat due to urban expansion, coyotes were historically not socially tolerated and were hunted for recreation and/or control.

Why have coyotes returned to San Francisco?

San Francisco is not alone in managing urban coyotes. Cities across the nation, including Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, and Denver, are also managing the relatively recent recolonization of this animal. Successful urban colonization by these animals is a combination of their biology and a reflection of contemporary society.

Coyote biology: they are highly intelligent habitat generalists that will colonize wherever there is sufficient food (raccoons, rats, gophers, skunks, etc.), water, and refuge.

Contemporary Society: Social acceptance and approval of firearms and hunting have declined while animal rights views have increased within urban/suburban areas. These social changes were reflected in the 1974 ending of state/federal sponsored mammalian bounties in California. With the reduction/removal of these urban pressures, these animals began to move back into surrounding urban areas, eventually recolonizing San Francisco in the early 2000s. Coyotes returned to the Presidio in 2002 and are now seen here regularly.

What do coyotes look like?

- large erect ears, narrow muzzles, and golden brown eyes
- bushy tails held down when the animal is in motion
- reddish-yellow, tan, brown, or grey coloring
- bib-like patch of white fur around lower jaw and neck
- darker grey and black hairs on upper body and lighter cream-colored undersides
- between 20-40 pounds, but often appear heavier in the winter due to a thick double coat of fur. In the summer months they shed their thick coats and can appear lean or "scrawny."

What is their normal behavior? Why do urban coyotes appear to not mind the presence of humans?

In the wild, coyotes typically are timid animals with a natural fear of humans. Although coyotes tend to be most active in the evenings and early mornings they can be active throughout the day. In rural areas, activity in the day is significantly reduced or avoided due to the presence of larger predators and/or hunters.

Unlike their rural counterparts, urban coyotes have not learned to view humans as hunting predators. However, when humans “haze” or act aggressively (yelling, eye contact, throwing objects, etc.) towards coyotes, they will retreat under most circumstances (see pupping season questions below). Even in non-aggressive encounters, regular hazing is encouraged and will condition coyotes to learn that humans are an environmental aspect to be avoided. It is when coyotes are fed by humans and begin to associate humans with food that dangerous behaviors are likely to occur.

What should I do if a coyote approaches me?

There are occasions when coyotes need to be reminded to keep their distance from people. In the unlikely event that a coyote approaches you (or if you have an encounter within 50 feet and the coyote does not move away on its own accord) here are some things you can do:

- Be as big and loud as possible; shout in a deep, loud, and aggressive voice
- Wave your arms and throw small objects (to scare, not injure)
- Maintain eye contact (which makes them uncomfortable and timid)

If the coyote continues to approach, do not run or turn your back on the coyote but continue to exaggerate the above gestures.

What is pupping season?

Coyote pupping season typically runs from March through September. Coyotes mate in mid-February and are ready to give birth by mid-April. During this time, both when nearing birthing time and once the pups are born, coyote parents are more protective of their denning areas and more active in hunting food. Their level of activity and protectiveness rises even more as the pups begin to venture out of the den in early summer.

Why do conflicts between dogs and coyotes increase during pupping season?

Pupping season is the most significant time of the year for dog owners/walkers to be aware of their surroundings. Coyotes are members of the canine family and can be reactive to the presence of dogs. During pupping season, coyotes exhibit den protective behaviors and will guard a localized area from other canines that are regarded as outsiders attempting to kill the pups. These protective behaviors are always focused on canines and are somewhat predictable within the localized den area. Because of this localized activity, preventative measures and avoidance of the specific denning area will result in a significant reduction of incidents.

What do I do if my dog(s) and I encounter a coyote during pupping season?

Owners should always have their dogs on leash when walking in the Presidio. In the event of a dog/coyote encounter, be calm, initiate the hazing actions listed above, and quickly leave the area. Coyote aggressiveness is an attempt to frighten other canines away from the den. This protective behavior can sometimes override their response to standard hazing techniques and they may not retreat. In this case, calmly and quickly (do not run) leaving the area will usually terminate this aggressive response. If the coyote follows, continue to walk further away from the denning area. Having your dog on a leash at all times will prevent the possibility of the pet running towards the coyote which

could amplify the conflict. In the Presidio, signage identifying active denning areas will inform dog walkers of areas to be avoided (also see the *Coyotes in the Presidio* webpage at www.presidio.gov/about/nature/Pages/coyote.aspx for a list of known areas to be avoided with dogs). Please mind the signs for the safety of your animal.

How can I protect my cat?

The only way to guarantee your cat's safety is to keep it indoors.

How do I discourage coyotes from visiting my neighborhood?

- tightly secure garbage and compost bins
- refrain from leaving pet food and water outdoors
- never leave pets unattended outdoors

Do the Presidio coyotes have rabies?

None of the coyotes in the Presidio have exhibited the type of abnormal behavior associated with rabies. Behaviors such as the animal appearing excessively drunk or wobbly, circling, seeming partially paralyzed, acting disorientated, or mutilating itself may be signs of disease.

Why can't we permanently get rid of coyotes?

Coyotes are abundant throughout the Bay Area. Where there is suitable habitat (e.g. Golden Gate Park, Presidio, Twin Peaks, McLaren Park, Lake Merced, etc.) coyotes will and have colonized. If a coyote is removed from its local territory, another will quickly take its place. In other words, there is an endless supply surrounding the greater Bay Area. Coyotes came back to San Francisco on their own and will continue to thrive here in today's urban environment.

If they are breeding in the city won't their populations get out of control?

Coyotes have complex hierarchical social behavior which naturally limits their populations in a given area. Territories are established and defended from other coyotes by an alpha pair. Urban territories tend to be smaller due to limited resources and therefore limit coyote carrying capacity. When pups are old enough, parents will aggressively run them out of the territory. Pups will disperse to establish territory that is not currently claimed. For example: The Presidio, roughly 2.3 square miles, has enough space/resources to support two breeding pairs, around four resident adult individuals (USGS, Erin Boydston, Research Ecologist).

Is there any way to prevent coyotes from continuing to breed? Wouldn't that remove this seasonal aggression?

The only means to eliminating breeding would be through surgical sterilization. Both logistically and financially, this is not a realistic option.

Why is monitoring important and how does the Presidio Trust manage coyotes?

Careful coyote monitoring helps us understand the Presidio's coyote population and ensure human safety. The Presidio Trust monitors coyotes by documenting public reports and performing professional research (e.g. camera traps, detailed observations, and tracking of coyote hotspots). Coyotes exhibit different "personalities," much like domesticated pets, with some being shyer or bolder than others. Therefore, we endeavor to identify coyote individuals whenever possible.

There are a variety of non-lethal management techniques that we use to help us haze coyotes and keep them fearful of humans (e.g. paintball guns and ultra-sonic emitters). We also recognize that public

education and participation play a significant role in the management of coyotes and in discouraging unwanted behaviors. For example, preventing coyotes from habituating to human food (via securing trash cans and never feeding them) and frequent hazing, will bolster and maintain a healthy (and distant) relationship. In the rare case when an individual coyote exhibits abnormal behavior, lethal removal has and will occur.

Why can't you remove a coyote by relocating it?

It is illegal in the state of California to relocate coyotes. Studies have also shown that most translocated individuals will attempt to travel back to their home territory. The only way to remove a coyote is with lethal removal, which has occurred twice over the last decade in the Presidio.

What are the goals of the Presidio Trust regarding the presence of these animals over the long term?

Due to the fact that coyotes will continue to colonize this park, the Presidio Trust's goals are to ensure public safety, minimize encounters, and keep resident coyotes wild. In order to achieve these goals, the Presidio Trust is promoting community education in addition to harnessing and applying the most current scientific understanding of coyotes. The only realistic and sustainable approach to promote human safety and manage coyote activity is through maintaining stable pairs of coyotes within their occupied territory, thus excluding other coyotes (potentially more aggressive/unconditioned to avoid humans), while naturally regulating their own population size. With informed community participation, it is possible to sufficiently condition resident animals to maintain a healthy fear and avoidance of humans. Community education and our exhibited behaviors (e.g. avoiding identified areas with dogs during pupping season, not feeding coyotes, and general hazing practices) are key to coexistence. Management of urban coyotes is far more effective when the community is informed and aware of likely interactions and how best to deal with or avoid them.