

## 1. Coyote: Friend or Foe?

Coyotes, also known as the American Jackal, or prairie wolf, are a species of canine which are found throughout North and Central America. In South Dakota, the coyote is the state animal.

Coyotes are excellent hunters with good vision and a strong sense of smell. They can run up to 40 miles an hour. In the fall and winter, they form packs for more effective hunting. They communicate with a distinctive call, which at night often develops into a canine chorus.

Coyotes are adaptable animals, meaning they find ways to survive in practically any habitat. They are carnivores, or meat eaters, which will eat almost anything. Some of their prey includes rabbits, fish, frogs, woodchucks, deer, insects, snakes, fruit, grass, carrion, (or dead animals), as well as rodents such as prairie dogs, squirrels and mice.

During times and in areas where prey is hard to find, (for example. during a harsh winter), they will seldom kill lambs, calves, or other livestock, which leads to misconceptions and fears which cause some ranchers and farmers to regard them as destructive pests. However many people aren't aware of the benefits that coyotes contribute to our ecosystem. Predators in general, including coyotes, serve a valuable function in keeping prey species in balance with their habitat. Populations of rodents and small animals, such as skunks and raccoons, could increase out of control without predators to feed on them.

While coyotes may change ecological balances of predator and prey species, they will not eliminate other species from the environment. Many scavenger animals benefit from coyote predation by feeding on the carcasses that coyotes leave behind. So essentially, coyotes are beneficial to us and the environment by keeping rodent populations in check, as well as beneficial to other creatures, which might not be as good of hunters.

It seems every attempt has been made to get rid of them, even though they are an important part of the food chain, and they roamed our lands well before we did. Perhaps, as conservationists, we should ask ourselves...would we rather find ways to live in harmony with them, or find out what it would be like for us to live without them?

### **Sources:**

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