



The misunderstood coyote

How to make the best of life with our newest wild neighbor

COYOTES GO OUT OF THEIR WAY to stay out of ours: They're partial to open areas but seek hiding places in cities. They're naturally active in daylight but adopt nocturnal lifestyles when living near humans. They can follow traffic signals and cross roads after rush hour. They even try to "escort" dog walkers away from den sites where vulnerable young play.

Yet for all their efforts to politely coexist, these intelligent, adaptable canines receive little thanks. Coyotes rarely attack people—only one fatality has ever been recorded in the U.S.—but sadly, the reverse isn't true. "Roughly once every

minute ... someone somewhere is ending the life of a coyote," writes historian Dan Flores in his book *Coyote America*.



Our mass extermination of wolves made way for these smaller cousins to trot into every state but Hawaii and, in many places, assume the role of top predator.

They die in wildlife killing contests, which award prizes for shooting the most animals the fastest. They're victims of aerial gunning, poisoning and trapping by federal agents engaged in a century-old, fruitless battle to eradicate them from ranching country. More recently, they've confronted newer threats: persecution by local communities, where their mere presence makes headlines: "Coyote sighting puts Cary neighbors on high alert." "Why are coyotes showing up in Philadelphia?"

But coyotes have roamed this land longer than people have, surviving stressors that doomed camels and elephants here. Though likely new to modern life in parts of the U.S., they've thrived near us for 15,000 years, inspiring Native American creation stories and Aztec worship while subsisting on mice, rats, rabbits and other small animals who inhabit human settlements. "Coyotes took our measure a long, long time ago," says Flores. "They figured out that they could get the goody out of being around us without having to be domesticated."

That refusal to be tamed may be why America's song dogs—whose howl Flores calls our "original national anthem"—inspire unwarranted fears. They're so closely related to domesticated dogs that, though it's uncommon, they can breed with them. At the same time, they're not interested in being our besties, even eluding scientists who study them. When Lynsey White worked on the Cook County Coyote Project in Chicago, radio telemetry pinpointed what her eyes could not: coyotes in brush, construction zones and a restaurant parking lot. "We got very close," recalls White, HSUS director of humane wildlife conflict resolution. "But I did not see one coyote the whole time."

When coyotes do enter our sightlines—in suburban gardens, city parks or, most famously, a Chicago sandwich shop to cool off on a hot day—they're chasing the shadows of human disturbance. Our mass extermination of wolves made way for these smaller cousins to trot into every state but Hawaii and, in many places, assume the role of top predator. Our animal