



Urban Wildlife Issues  
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried  
as appearing in the *Burnaby NOW*

## Sharing your urban world with coyotes and birds



Coyotes were first sighted in Vancouver in the 1980s. There are now an estimated 200 to 300 in the city, and as many as 3,000 in the Lower Fraser valley.

Our family had a brief coyote sighting in the VanDusen Botanical Gardens, located on the Westside of Vancouver. At first glance one could confuse the small tan coloured animal for a dog, but the delicate limbs, large erect ears and bushy tail, together with the shy evasive nature, marked it as a coyote. It stayed only long enough for us to determine it was indeed a coyote.

If only all animal encounters were as brief and non eventful.

We have a young male coyote currently in care at the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA) who made a rather more shocking connection with humans. He was hit by a car.

Visibility is poor at this time of year, particularly later in the day. There have been news stories about people hit by cars because they were not wearing reflective clothing. Animals of course don't change their outfits when they go for a jog, so it falls on us to take extra care when driving in areas where there is wildlife.

Our young coyote was pretty shook up when he arrived. He was convulsing and his hip was damaged. In addition he is showing signs of brain damage but we can't yet gauge how severe it is. Our coyote is now able to walk, but only in circles, and his vision is impaired. He is recovering slowly.

Despite the patient's current condition, his chances are fair. Coyotes are smart, adaptable animals that can manage many injuries. That is part of the reason for their success.

Although coyotes prefer to live in open grassland, they can and will inhabit a wide range of habitats. They are now found from Alaska to Central America and from the west to the east coast of the continent. Their diet too is varied and they will eat small mammals, eggs, birds, vegetation, fruit, grains, bird seed, garbage, insects and occasionally domestic pets. If you're prepared to eat it all – then your chances of survival are far better.

Just because coyotes are happy to eat garbage does not mean they should. As my children like to say “a fed coyote is a dead coyote”. Like any wild critter, if a coyote finds an easy meal it’s going to take advantage of it and come back for more. The coyote will become accustomed to being around people and that is a recipe for disaster – usually for the coyote. Feeding a coyote is even more dangerous. In the few instances where a coyotes have bitten children, it is often because the coyote was fed by a misguided human.

The best way to help wild critters like coyotes is to stay well away from them. Do not feed them and secure your garbage.

Incidentally approximately 90 British Columbians are hospitalized every year because of domestic dog bites. This does not include emergency room visits. Only a handful of people have ever recorded a coyote bite.

Where the coyote is fairly successful at dealing with the scarcity of winter, others have a more difficult time, particularly given the kind of weather we’ve experienced in the Lower Mainland these past few months.

As I look out over the latest snowfall I see inconvenience. But to some birds and animals it is a deadly blanket separating them from their food. With snow covering the ground, those who forage have more difficult finding tasty morsels. And when they do find food it may be frozen and they will have difficulty in picking it up. The recent flooding also presented problems for wildlife. Many areas where animals might normally look for food were submerged in water, and the debris caused by the storms also limited feeding prospects.

The snow usually means more birds in care, not just because they are undernourished, but also because after snowstorms they tend to fly into windows more frequently. Often after a snowstorm we have unusually sunny days. More sunlight means more reflections in the glass; the confused birds see sky reflected in the glass and collide with windows.

You can help by placing decals on your windows; the more the better. Place them on the exterior side of the glass if possible. Your simple act of kindness will help birds to see a threat not immediately obvious to them.

Happy New Year. We hope you will enjoy the wild birds and animals sharing your urban world, from a distance.

Nicky Fried writes for the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC located at 5216 Glencarin Drive on Burnaby Lake. The Wildlife Rescue Association cares for injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wildlife. If you have an animal in distress call the WRA at 604.526.7275.