

Coyotes In Iowa

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Adam Janke, Olivia Hanlon

C Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with real life.

O Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode I visit with Adam janky Wildlife Specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Today we are talking about coyotes. I'm Olivia Hanlon farm food and Enterprise Development Extension Education Specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Adam, welcome. We're glad to have you back on.

A Adam Janke 00:46

Yes. Thanks for having me.

O Olivia Hanlon 00:48

So, Adam, it's been a while since you've been on, we're glad to have you back. And we always enjoy having you on. So let's get started today with a little bit of background info here on coyotes here in Iowa.

A Adam Janke 01:01

Yeah, so coyotes are a rather ubiquitous mammal. And in fact, this blog article I just wrote, I majorly speculated, but I'm pretty sure I was right. That probably every Iowan goes to sleep at night, within two miles of a coyote. And I pulled that number, like Admittedly, I just like kind of

made that up. But I was just trying to think like, Okay, what's the most like, barren landscape we have in the state and they would be like, picture like north central Iowa, just like nothing but corn and beans for miles and miles. But in a two mile if you gave me a two mile radius of someone's bedroom, I bet there's some sort of feature in even in those most barren landscapes that a coyote is taking advantage of. And then we find that coyotes live everywhere they live in cities like they're definitely living in the Des Moines metro region. They live in Sioux City, they live in Fort Dodge, they live all over the place. So they're rather remarkable in that respect. Coyotes have been in the land that we call Iowa for as long as well, for as long as people have been here, probably. And so the thinking on coyotes is that they were probably primarily like a Great Plains species and a southwestern species like kind of like arid landscapes. Early European settlers called them prairie wolves, like because like Lewis and Clark saw him for the first time, like around Chamberlain, South Dakota, you know, so just to kind of give you a feel for where coyotes were in the early 1800s. But today, we find them all over the place. I mean, they go like, all the way up to Alaska, they go all the way east into the Canadian provinces, like northeast of Maine, I'm gonna get, you know, like Labrador, like goes kind of Newfoundland, those areas. I think, I don't know, my Canadian province. Well, but you know, those northeastern United States are in the southeastern United States. And then, of course, they're still ubiquitous in those arid regions where they've always been like in the southwest. So anyway, yeah, coyotes have been in Iowa for a really long time, and today are doing quite well across the state.

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Olivia Hanlon 03:08

So they're doing well, Adam. But what does that mean, the exact status of coyotes is here in Iowa now?

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Adam Janke 03:14

Yeah, so that's a good question. A lot of people will, you know, intuit that coyote populations have increased, and that's depending on the timescale we look at. That's certainly true. Coyotes were on a list of species, along with wolves, mountain lions, bison, black bears, and others that were intensively persecuted in Iowa during the time of European settlement in so as European settlers showed up here, they had this idea that they wanted to sort of extirpate predators, anything that was killing, particularly livestock, or posing any sort of threat. And so they tried, and they were successful with everything except for the coyote. Like all those species I listed black bears, they kind of like colonized into the state, but not really. And then, you know, they don't have a stronghold here, and they're not afforded the protections here. And then mountain lions, you know, they're extirpated, they would have historically been abundant. And then of course, we know gray wolves are historically quite abundant Iowa in our today not found anywhere really relatively close. We get an occasional visitor, but they're pretty rare. And so coyotes are the one that despite that intensive, short sighted persecution that those early European settlers subjected them to they persisted somehow and, and people have tried really hard to get rid of them, but they haven't. So anyway, coyote populations were relatively low in the early 1900s. Due to all of that persecution poisoning trapping shooting in the bounties and the like. And then today, they have been on a pretty steady increase. Harvest records in the state show a pretty drastic increase from like the early 1900s. Too today, you know, there's a lot more coyotes harvested in the state than there were in the early 1900s Following all that persecution. So yes, Coyote populations over long term periods have

increased. There's probably more coyotes today in Iowa there were in, say, 1800s or 1400s. Like take a snapshot in time. Just because their top dog literally they, you know, there are no wolves. There are no mountain lions. There are no black bears. There are no other main carnivores. Coyotes are like the last lone survivor in terms of high level mammalian predator, other than people. And so yeah, they're, they're doing quite well. And gosh, they're adaptable, too, which is really interesting. So, yeah, sorry, that was a long way to answer to your question. But over long time periods, they've definitely increased short time periods, like the last 10 years, Coyote populations, maybe a gradual increase, but for the most part, you know, relatively stable population insurance based on the few monitoring metrics that we have for coyote populations.

O Olivia Hanlon 05:59

Okay. So what you're telling us, Adam is they're pretty resilient.

A Adam Janke 06:03

Oh, they're so resilient. They're a remarkable species. Coyotes are polarizing, you know, like, people love to hate coyotes. You know, and I grew up in a rural community too. And I, I was inclined maybe to hate coyotes. And I certainly don't feel that way anymore. That's not to say we don't have conflicts with coyotes that are, you know, important parts of living in rural landscapes or even living in urban landscapes. But we, you know, we can coexist with this thing. And they're just, they're such a remarkable species. They just have this fascinating life history with these tight family groups. They're really territorial. That's why you hear them so much there. And then I don't know I anytime I see one, I find it very enjoyable. Sort of a highlight of my day when I get an opportunity to see a coyote.

O Olivia Hanlon 06:51

All right. So like you said, Adam, we do have a couple issues with them every now and again, and like you said earlier, they are predators. So a lot of our listeners have livestock. Let's talk a little bit about that aspect of it shortly. What kind of livestock do we need to be concerned about when we look at what coyotes will prey on?

A Adam Janke 07:10

Yeah, great question. And yes, of course, coyotes are carnivores. They're a rather omnivorous carnivore. I mean, they'll eat almost anything, including the scavenging getting animals which is relevant for our discussion, but what are they most likely to prey upon? Well, you know, they're a relatively small canine, so they're definitely not going to affect cows and horses and things like that full grown things that we worry more about young. And so you know, during kidding season, or lambing season or calving season, you know, there are special considerations maybe to make to protect the herd or to protect the livestock on the farm from coyotes that they may prey on. The other thing to note is that sometimes we just find there's problem individuals, which is to say, like maybe one just really gets a taste for Lambs. And that's the problem individual it isn't all coyotes. Of course, many coyotes have a pretty healthy

fear of human dwellings and don't want to come anywhere near our livestock. And so young, small livestock tend to be the thing that we do concern ourselves with in there, we can just take some preventative measures. What is that expression, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. However, that expression works when it comes to lots of things as it relates to relating to and fitting into the environment. And that's definitely true with coyotes. So we can do things like try to shorten up our cabin kitting or lambing seasons to be relatively contracted, so that we're not putting young vulnerable livestock on the landscape over a long period of time where coyotes may be able to specialize or prey on them. We also may consider moving them into corrals, especially at night because coyotes of course are most active at night and at dawn and dusk so moving them into corrals, with motion activated lights can also help and then there's a whole suite a whole army so to speak of livestock protection, the animals things like donkeys and llamas dogs that have been shown effective in some areas like for example where sheep predation may be problematic in large sheep production landscapes to put livestock protection dogs or other livestock protection animals out into the pastures, especially during lambing season, say that can help fend off any of those potential coyote depredation events.

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Olivia Hanlon 09:27

Absolutely. That makes a lot of sense, Adam, I feel like the only other one that I hear about all the time that you didn't mention is maybe chickens and our birds. How do we go about helping protect our birds?

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Adam Janke 09:40

Well, it's a good question one. Coyotes The reason I focused on mammals is because coyotes are really mammal specialists now that doesn't say that like I'm not denying that I don't you know, occasionally snack on a chicken or Yeah, or like fur on wildlife ecologist, you know, like, coyotes will occasionally captured All turkeys and stuff like that, like that definitely happens. But our most like most problematic bird consumer is a red fox, you know, they're pretty ubiquitous in this state. And they're sort of more zeroed in on preying on birds. And they tend to be more of a problem in those chicken facilities, but the advice is the same, which is, you know, putting them away at night. And then also being, you know, having the flock or having the herd in close proximity to people. You know, I mentioned that coyotes have this healthy fear of people. And we can reinforce that by hazing coyotes, anytime we see them. This doesn't mean like shooting at them necessarily. It means basically, anytime you see a coyote around your house or around your livestock, especially going out of your way to kind of scare it off and make sure that it sort of has that healthy fear of people can go a long way and just avoiding issues where coyotes become habituated, to people more bold and thus more willing to attack livestock so that yeah, the rules kind of apply putting the chickens away at night is the big one.

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Olivia Hanlon 11:08

Okay, so we've dwelled on a little bit of like, the bad side of coyotes, but they have their good sides to right, what can you tell us about why they're important to keep in our ecosystem? And things like that?

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Adam Janke 11:21

Yeah, well, there's lots of reasons. I mean, you know, there's this like Aldo Leopold, quote, The first principle of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts and something like that it is true that everything plays a role in these environments, and they're rather disrupted. And to the extent possible, we just try to like steward the resources that we have and protect life, it's just kind of like the humane or ethically right thing to do. So there's that argument then. The other argument, of course, is like coyotes do a lot of good, like what we call like ecosystem goods and services, you know, in terms of like suppressing populations of rodents or paths. So like, ground burrowing animals that may be passed around the pasture or something like you know, coyotes could conceivably suppress those populations or playing a role in the management of disease by keeping populations of raccoons and possums and skunks in check, you know, like things that they may be more inclined to, to feed on it, you know, they kind of play an important role there. And then there yeah, there's a sort of like aesthetics or emotional reasons. Like I said, I think a lot of people get a lot of joy out of seeing a coyote occasionally. You know, most of our interactions with coyotes are really fleeting and don't pose any sort of risk to people and it's just fun to observe coyotes. I love to listen to coyotes, you know, they, their scientific name is *Canis latrans*. *Canis latrans* just means dog like wolves are in the *Canis* genus in their species named *latrans*. It's just as like loud or barking, like, so they're like the loud barking dog. And, you know, we know that anybody that spends time in the countryside at night, of course, hears these things. And that all has to do with their territoriality. And that really neat family structure that they have. And I just love that I the sound of that from a deer stand or the sound of that from a campsite or a back porch is a pretty welcome sound. So I think it's, you know, humans just derive benefits from coyotes in that way as well. So,

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Olivia Hanlon 13:17

okay, and so you mentioned at the very beginning of our podcast here, we don't see coyotes only in rural settings, we see them in more of the urban areas as well. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

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Adam Janke 13:31

Yeah, the city coyote thing is just absolutely fascinating. And it's a relatively new thing. There's a couple of reasons that it's a relatively new thing. One thought is that there used to be a bunch of stray dogs in cities. And so the like, coyotes were, you know, doing well, because coyotes don't get along with other dogs. Well, well, we should talk more about that actually. So that's a source of conflict, but like, you know, they they like to establish our territories and they keep one another out and stuff like that. And so one argument is that the passage of leash laws getting feral dog populations and stuff under control for human health and safety, and then ethical reasons that happened during the 1900s has sort of facilitated coyotes to become top dog in many cities, actually, which is really fascinating. These cities ranged from everything from like the Moines and associated suburbs. Coyotes have you found in and then all the way up to LA and Chicago, where there's been some just absolutely fascinating research where they put tracking devices on these coyotes and understand where and how they live in they are just living in absolute, like urban jungles. They've learned how to cross streets because, you know, avoiding traffic. They've learned how to feed in these cities and reliably find food and places that then in Yeah, it's just kind of reflects their remarkable adaptations. We have that here in

Iowa, we have cities where coyotes have been able to thrive their most common in cities around air Is with lots of green space. And so if you're at a picture of suburb say, imagine being close to a park or being close to a golf course or something like that those are the areas where coyotes and humans tend to overlap the most like sort of on the edges of those natural areas adjacent to really urban areas are in the vast majority of those places. Coyotes and humans coexist quite nicely. But in some of those places, admittedly, there are opportunities for conflicts and that is because as I mentioned, coyotes are specialists on small mammals, rabbits, voles, shrews, mice, these types of things comprise 90% of a typical coyote diet in a given year. And sometimes our pets look a lot like those small mammals, they are indeed small mammals themselves, and they can be that can be a problem. And so I don't mean to make light of that to anybody that's lost a pet before to coyote depredation, but that can potentially be a source of conflict and in rural areas. Now, our guidance is the same. And I'm going to try that expression. Again, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And in urban areas that applies all the same, just like we said, lighted corrals and monitoring animals and hazing coyotes as a way to coexist with coyotes in the countryside. The same thing applies to the city. So we should always, you know, at any opportunity we see a coyote in the city, we should take an opportunity to haze it scared away, make yourself look big throw stuff at it, squirt a squirt gun or water hose at it or whatever, we shouldn't give them free meals. So we should bring cat food and pet food in at night. We should harass, harass them when we see him. And then we should also make sure that our pets are supervised when they're outside. So putting a small dog out in the backyard at night in the city where there's coyotes is risk. And if we you know, just supervise those pets time outside, then it really just takes most of that risk away. And we can coexist with these things. So, in all the benefits of coyotes apply to cities as well, you know, controlling small mammal populations and associated disease challenges. And then also the cool aesthetics, listening to coyotes howl in the city or seeing them across the street is a pretty neat phenomena that we should all be excited about. We just have to learn to coexist, essentially.

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Olivia Hanlon 17:26

Yeah, you know, Adam, I never would have thought about taking stray dogs off the street having an effect on the coyote population in urban areas. But now that you say it makes a whole lot of sense.

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Adam Janke 17:37

Yeah, it is a really neat phenomenon. And this, the urban adapting coyote is really interesting. Now I just finished his book about coyotes recently. And they talked about you know, in the southwest, many Native American cultures had lots of spiritual and emotional connections to coyotes of people and coyotes have always been connected in North America. But this new innates have probably always come around urban areas to get free food or easy food or something like that. But this new behavior of coyotes relatively new phenomenon where they're moving into these really urban intensively developed landscapes, has a lot of ecologist scratching their head, just wondering, how does the species that is, by all accounts pretty afraid to humans? You know, if you see a coyote they run away, really quickly, you know, yeah, this, the species that we would say is inclined towards not being around people has figured out a way to literally live in our backyards in done it all across the country. They're living right next

door to people. So it's really fascinating. It's one reason I just think, again, this is a species worth understanding and showing compassion for and learning doing the work that people can do to learn how to change our behaviors ensure that we can coexist with them.

O Olivia Hanlon 18:49

Absolutely, Adam. So on that track, you have a couple new resources about coyotes that you'd like to share with us don't you?

A Adam Janke 18:57

Yes. So lots of things on the coyote situation. One Yes, we have some we have an article on our website, our natural resources Extension website where we hope people can find answers to all sorts of questions about water, wildlife, forestry and other natural resources topics that are important here in Iowa. And so I definitely point people there we have it housed on our problem wildlife page, because the reason people find our resources tends to be because they have are perceived to have a conflict with a coyote because of pets or depredation of livestock and the things we've been talking about. So you can find the coyote page on our problem Wildlife website and learn a lot about some of these resources that I've been talking about like hazing and other things. The other thing that I wanted to mention is that there's a lot of professionals that can help if we do have problem coyotes and I put this kind of positive spin on coyotes because there's a lot of coyotes in Iowa and not that many conflicts relative to the number of coyotes that are out there. Most of these coyotes are out there just feeding away on raspberries and pears and Apples, you know, underneath fruit trees or eating that 90% of their diet during most of the year that small mammals and just not causing any conflicts at all. But that's not to discount that many listeners, I'm sure have had an occasional conflict and or unfortunately lost livestock or lost a pet to coyote depredation. And so we have ways of dealing with that, you know, there's professionals in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in the US Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services, that both can help consult on techniques for abating coyote depredation issues, or maybe even consult on the use of lethal control, if that's necessary with a coyote that's, you know, kind of tuned in to become a problem individual. And so we can you can also find those on our website. If you go to our website, we have this resource called contacts, and then wildlife conflict resolution, and you can click on contacts, wildlife conflict resolution, and select your county and find those names for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources wildlife depredation professional, the USDA APHIS professional that you could contact to ask questions about livestock stock issues, or nuisance wildlife control operators that can help them cities or in rural areas, address wildlife conflicts, both with coyotes or a range of other potential species that we have issues with.

O Olivia Hanlon 21:18

Okay, I will add direct links to those and Adams talked about in the show notes below. Adam, Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to add?

A Adam Janke 21:29

Yeah, there's one more thing that I wanted to mention, like kind of related to some of these

Yeah, there's one more thing that I wanted to mention, like kind of related to some of these resources we talked about. And that is, do we have a coyote problem? I think, especially in urban areas, sometimes people think just seeing a coyote means they have a coyote problem. Or we've seen this where like, the news will do a story about a coyote that was seen in a city. And I always roll my eyes at that. I'm like, really? That's not, that's not really news. Like, there's coyotes in cities, it's one of many. Yeah, it'd be like doing a story on a squirrel at a city. You know, like, we all kind of laugh at that. But for some reason, because coyotes are a little more elusive or whatever we they tend to hit the headlines sometimes. And then people freak out. So one of the things we wanted to do when we develop this resource that I mentioned, that's on our website, is like help people distinguish whether or not you have a coyote problem. And so we put a bunch of levels in and basically like, if you saw a coyote, especially if it was a dawn or dusk, you don't have a coyote problem, just enjoy it. It's exciting and worth seeing. And then we can kind of like step through a series of different levels. And this is outlined in this table on that on the website. And basically, the most severe case where we actually do you need to be concerned about a coyote is approaching people aggressively following children preying on pets or livestock frequently, that's like our level four, like, Okay, this is a real problem that we need to definitely probably solve with direct control of problem individuals. But there's sort of a gradient in there. And in there is where we're going to do those changing human behaviors, because it's easier to change human behaviors than it is people behaviors or just shifting our expectations and tolerating occasional coyote interactions and enjoying them. And then it's important in each one of these steps that we diagnose this specific problem, because one common issue with coyotes particularly in rural settings, is they get implicated in things that they didn't really do like scavenging dead deer or scavenging livestock that died from a disease or some other cause in the coyotes, they'll get implicated. So we want to think really critically about whether or not we have an issue. Just simply seeing coyotes is not an issue. And in fact, it's a good thing. But we want to encourage people to think that way and then process sort of logically, whether or not you're seeing them really often during the day or they're, they're being really aggressive or showing aggressive tendencies towards livestock, pets, or in very rare instances, people. And then we want to try to escalate our approach to dealing with them. And that's basic coexistence with carnivores that people literally all across the world engage in with all sorts of different species of carnivorous animals. And it's just good sound way to live and get along with the natural world and everybody benefits from

 Olivia Hanlon 24:13

absolutely good advice for everyone there, Adam. Awesome. All right. Well, Adam, thank you very much for joining us. We always enjoy having you on and hope to have you back on soon.

 Adam Janke 24:24

Okay, thanks a lot. Olivia. Have a great day.

 Olivia Hanlon 24:27

Thank you, Adam.

 Speaker 3 24:29



Speaker 5 24.20

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