

***Important Notice to All Residents From the
Springfield Oaks Board of Directors
September 28, 2009***

On Sunday, September 27th, a neighbor reported seeing a small coyote on Laurel Oaks Court. Due to the recent clearing of trees at the Fort Belvoir EPG site, we may see an increase in animal activity in our neighborhood so please be on the lookout and report any strange animal behavior as detailed below. The following information is from the Fairfax County website pertaining to coyotes:

Coyotes in Fairfax County - Fact and Fiction

Coyotes play a big role in American culture, whether they are wreaking havoc in Native American folk tales or baying at the moon in the movies. In mythology, coyotes are ever the clever mischief-maker, a reputation earned from their real-life stealth, swiftness and adaptability.

There has been some press lately about coyotes in the county. But what's the real story? Is it just a lot of hype? Resources spoke with FCPD wildlife biologist Earl Hodnett to straighten out some of myths and realities surrounding our very own county coyotes. Still rare and with a relatively small population, coyotes aren't more or less a concern than any other wildlife we have in the county, be it bears, raccoons, deer or snakes.

What's the big picture? - The big picture is that coyotes are now in every county of the nation, except maybe Hawaii. They're hardly unique to this area. Everybody's got them.

Are there benefits to having coyotes? - The good news for Fairfax County is that coyotes will help normalize two animal populations that have overgrown due to the lack of a natural predator, and have presented a nuisance problem for citizens. These are rats and Canada geese.

Coyotes will help clean up the high rat population and other rodents as well, which is a welcome activity. In the case of Canada geese, coyotes like eating goose eggs (and occasionally a goose dinner), which should help to mitigate the big soiling problem the county has when geese overrun sports fields, parks, school grounds and lawns.

Are we likely to see a coyote? - Probably not. Coyotes are smart, secretive and nocturnal. They also tend to avoid humans.

What do they look like? - The Eastern coyote is different from the Western coyote. They're bigger for one thing, having cross-bred over recent decades with wolves. They're brownish-gray with an average weight of about thirty-five pounds. Although you might hear one, they are not as vocal as their Western cousins.

What do you do if you actually spot one? - Nothing. The county knows they're here so you shouldn't do anything more than you would if you saw a skunk or raccoon. Often, people call saying they've sited a coyote when in fact, they've seen a gray fox or a mangy red fox.

Should we be concerned? - Not really. They're part of our wildlife now. Coyotes, just like in the old Western movies, are primarily a concern to farmers. For Fairfax County citizens, the big concern is letting out pets at night -- cats or small dogs, which could be killed if they wander into coyote territory.

It's also very important that you don't leave food sources out at night, like dog food or food on compost piles, and secure garbage can lids.

Can coyotes be scared off? - Yes. Just yell at them. Coyotes generally aren't confrontational and would rather avoid humans and run away than get in a fight, although they might get into a tug-of-war if you tried to grab away their catch.

However, if a coyote is behaving abnormally or aggressively, like a rabid dog, then call the county police non-emergency number -- 703-691-2131 -- and they will dispatch an animal control officer.