

Coyote-dog encounters jump in north Boulder

City issues alert after four close calls since November

By John Aguilar Camera Staff Writer

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Note: There were coyote sightings on Mt. Laurel last night – a pack of three. Be aware for dogs, cats, and small children's safety.

Four close calls between dogs and coyotes in north Boulder in the last two months prompted the city on Tuesday to remind residents that wild and domestic members of the canine family don't mix.



Janet Meyer and her dog, Ollie, go into Boulder's Foothills Community Dog Park on Tuesday. She said she's aware of coyotes in the area and has noticed warnings, like this one on the park's gate. (Cliff Grassmick)

The increased coyote activity has also spurred a small group of neighbors in north Boulder to hold a community meeting Wednesday to discuss what they can do to reduce the encounters.



A coyote, seen at mid-day Tuesday just north of Foothills Community Dog Park in Boulder. (Cliff Grassmick)

"We're going to do everything we can to make sure the coyotes know that this isn't a place where they want to make their home," said Melanie Murphy, a resident of Lee Hill Drive who will be at the meeting. "I have a neighbor with two small children. What if these coyotes get so brazen that they think these children are the same as my 60-pound dog?"

Valerie Matheson, Boulder's urban wildlife coordinator, said residents can take simple steps to decrease the likelihood they or their pets will run into a coyote. Those measures include keeping food and trash secure and putting pets on a leash or in a kennel.

"Coyotes are really smart and they'll take advantage of easy food sources," she said. "What we need to do is make them as uncomfortable as possible when they are getting close to humans or pets."

Matheson said the most recent series of dog-coyote encounters in north Boulder began Nov. 14 near Lakebriar Drive and Promontory Court, where a coyote snatched a dog and carried it off for a short distance. The coyote eventually dropped the dog, which required six stitches for its wounds.

On Dec. 16, a coyote jumped the fence at Foothills Community Dog Park while a woman was with her Boston terrier inside the enclosure. The coyote lunged at the dog a couple of times before the owner managed to scoop up her pet, Matheson said.

"I haven't heard of a coyote entering a dog park before," she said.

The city put up posters at the Foothills park, warning people of the incursion and encouraging them to be vigilant, Matheson said.

The two most recent confrontations happened in a residential area near Lee Hill Drive and Fourth Street and involved the same dog. Matheson said a pair of coyotes surrounded the dog -- a hound, border collie mix -- on Jan. 3. Neighbors managed to scare the coyotes away.

The next day, a coyote planted itself outside the dog's yard and "beckoned" the domestic animal until it leapt over the fence and gave chase, Matheson said. The dog eventually returned home uninjured.

"That is a concentrated amount of activity," Matheson said of the recent encounters. "At this point, we must make our best effort to make people aware about how to best protect their pets."

Murphy, who helped scare off the coyotes threatening her neighbor's dog, said she walked out of her house the other day to find two coyotes in her driveway.

"They should not feel comfortable in my driveway," she said Tuesday.

Murphy said she's frustrated because she doesn't want to see harm come to the coyotes, but she's also concerned that with so many brazen coyotes roaming her neighborhood it's only a matter of time before a person gets hurt.

Threat or injury to humans is the trigger for the Colorado Division of Wildlife to get involved. Division spokeswoman Jennifer Churchill said coyotes have snatched many pets in the Denver metro area over the last few years as the animals have become more accustomed to human habitats. But wildlife officials can't hunt down coyotes every time a cat or dog disappears, she said.

"From our standpoint, dog and coyote encounters are an animal going after another animal," Churchill said. "They're doing what coyotes do."

If it's determined that a coyote has bitten a person, she said, that animal will be killed. The Division of Wildlife does not relocate problem coyotes.

Churchill said people living in coyote areas need to learn to haze the animals by banging pots and pans together, yelling, or throwing small stones at them.

"Make it clear to them that they are not welcome near you or your pet," she said.

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Coyote tips

Do not feed wildlife. Feeding coyotes teaches them to associate people with food.

Do not approach or encourage interaction with wild animals.

Keep pets on a leash when outdoors.

Keep outdoor pets in kennels. Even pets in enclosed yards run the risk of predation, especially at night.

Keep pet food inside in order to prevent attracting wild animals.

Remind children to stay close to a group of people. If a child is approached by any wild animal, he or she should walk slowly away, backward.

Teach children that coyotes are wild, unpredictable animals that should never be approached and should only be viewed from a safe distance. If an animal appears 'jumpy' or nervous when people move, they are probably too close.

To report coyote attacks on pets, contact City of Boulder Urban Wildlife Coordinator Valerie Matheson at 303-441-3004 or mathesonv@bouldercolorado.gov.

For more information about living with coyotes, visit the Colorado Division of Wildlife Web site at <http://wildlife.state.co.us> or call 303-297-1192.

Source: City of Boulder