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Beware of Coyotes

By Sophie Braccini



Illustration Jaya Griggs

Ever get the feeling someone's following you? Maura Richards and Ellen Gunderson did while running on the hill trail off Rancho Laguna Park in Moraga the morning of Jan. 31- a pack of 10 coyotes started hunting them, or their dogs. Coyotes rarely attack humans, but given an opportunity they will go after pets.

"We were running the Canyon Loop Trail with our two dogs when we starting hearing the yelps and barks of coyotes on the hunt," recalled Richards. "It sounded like they were following us. When we reached the crossing where the dilapidated buildings stand, we saw them. A pack of 10, coming at us." Richards said that the band came within 30 feet of them. Their dogs immediately took off. Richards armed herself with a large stick and the two women ran back to the park. "Once we passed the cow fence they stopped," she said, adding that she had the scare of her life even though she thinks it is more likely that the wild animals were after the dogs than the people.

Coyotes are opportunistic, versatile carnivores with a dietary adaptability that has made them very successful, growing in number since human encroachment began. A

2004 study by Robert M. Timm, et al, for San Diego County showed an increase in the number of coyote attacks in California, especially in the southern suburban-wildlife interface. "Our observations indicate that in the absence of harassment by residents, coyotes can lose their fear of people and come to associate humans with this safe, resource-rich environment," they wrote. "In such situations, some coyotes have begun to act aggressively toward humans, chasing joggers and bicyclists, confronting people walking their dogs, and stalking small children." In northern California only one attack on a human was recorded.

UC Davis Integrated Pest Management Online concurs that the problem worsens when coyotes lose their fear of humans and that they need to be removed when that happens. Matt Slattengren at the Contra Costa Agriculture Department indicated that if an incident were reported to them, they would contact the state trapper who is in charge of removing coyotes.

The Department of Fish and Game recommends that if a coyote approaches you should try to frighten it away by shouting in a deep voice, waving your arms, throwing things at it, and looking it directly in the eyes; then retreat from the situation by walking slowly backward so as not to turn your back on the coyote. The agency also recommends stashing food and trash that attract coyotes and never leaving pets and small children unattended outside.

Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe indicated that the best number to call in a dangerous situation is either 911 or the county police dispatch line, (925) 284-5010; the call will be directed to the correct agency.

Nicole Kozicki, the Fish and Game warden for Moraga, said she had not heard about the incident but she would check to if there has been a pattern of attacks in Moraga, at which point the state trapper would be activated.

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