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Lamorinda attack coyote a repeat offender, still at large

By Nick Marnell



Illustration Jaya Griggs

Officials from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife confirmed that the coyote responsible for two attacks in Moraga and one in Lafayette is the exact same coyote.

Forensic scientists from Fish and Wildlife, through a DNA analysis, found that the DNA profile of the coyote in all three incidents was a match, according to Capt. Patrick Foy of the department's law enforcement division.

A coyote attacked and bit a young boy July 9 at the Moraga Commons, and the child's nanny hit the animal with a bike helmet to drive it away. The boy has fully recovered.

On Dec. 4, wildlife officers responded to a call of a man bitten in the leg by a coyote early in the morning at the Campolindo High School athletic field, less than two miles from the Commons. The man attacked, Moraga resident Kenji Sytz, said he was working out with his friends along the running track when he felt a sharp pain in his left calf.

"It ended up being a significant wound," said Sytz, who was treated at Kaiser Walnut Creek and released that day. "What was even tougher was the series of rabies

shots I had to get." Sytz's treatment concluded in mid-December.

Officers collected the pants Sytz wore as evidence and rushed them to the Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Sacramento. Foy said that scientists isolated a full coyote DNA profile from the spot where the animal's teeth went through the pants and ultimately into Sytz's skin.

Fish and Wildlife officials said that the DNA profile of the coyote that bit a store employee behind Diablo Foods in Lafayette the evening of Dec. 15 matched the profile of the coyote responsible for the two Moraga attacks. The fugitive coyote remains on the loose, with Fish and Wildlife, allied agencies and community partners continuing to search the area for the animal.

"People tend to oversimplify the capture process," Foy said. "The most difficult animal to catch is a coyote, which has adapted very well to living alongside humans. We can't just discharge a firearm in a public area." When officials eventually find the animal, Foy said it will be put down.

The attack investigations brought to light other aggressive coyote reports in the Lamorinda area where the animals approached people and their pets, including a sighting near the Moraga Starbucks in the Rheem Shopping Center.

Foy suggested that residents refer to keepmewild.org to learn ways to better coexist with coyotes and other wildlife. "Tips offered there are the most important ways individuals can help make progress in our statewide effort to live alongside wildlife," he said.

"Getting bit by a coyote was a crazy experience, and I'm glad it was me and not another child who got attacked," Sytz said. He advocates the use of good judgment and caution around all wildlife, but he asks that the community not rush to judgment based on the actions of "one sick animal."

"I hope that people in our community do not start to fear coyotes," Sytz said.

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