Portrayal of coyote-human interactions in the Canadian media

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Complex meanings

Who is *Canis latrans*?
Leptocyon sp. A (34 Ma)  
Small fox-sized species

Canis latrans (1 Ma)  
Shoulder Height 50 cm

Eucyon divisi (7 Ma)  
Shoulder Height 38 cm

Canis lepophagus (5 Ma)  
Slightly larger

Canis latrans (1 Ma)  
Shoulder Height 50 cm

Anagenetic evolution vs phylogenetic evolution

Canids first evolved in North America
We arrived approx 12,000 years ago

Canis lepophagus (5 Ma) vs Borophagus diversidens (which also lived in packs)
*Canis latrans* (1 Ma) takes a walk beside the Bow River in Banff National Park
Coyotes are ‘urban adaptive’

Highly “Resilient”

• Behavioural plasticity
• High Demographic Compensation
• Have been around > 1 million years in North America !!!
• Play an ecological role

A coyote hitches a ride on Portland transit (Feb 2002)
But how do we coexist?

1) Learn how coyotes make a living in the city (Ecological dimensions – Lukasik and Alexander)

2) Examine our role in their habituation (Social dimensions)

3) Identify actions to minimize habituation and maintain natural coyote behaviour \( (in \text{ theory}) \)

4) Understand nature of interactions and human perceptions (Social dimensions)
Social Dimensions Study

- Perceived rise in negative human-coyote interactions
- Need for human dimensions research in urban centres and urban protected areas
  - Coyotes elicit a range of human responses
- Need for management support
  - in the context that coyotes are important in the urban ecosystem
- Does media play a role in perceptions?

Reader is tired of playing second fiddle to animals like this coyote, snapped while out for a stroll downtown, at 1st Street and 6th Avenue S.W.

*If we’ve usurped animals’ territory, where’s ours?*
Objectives

- Compile coyote related articles from Canadian sources (search 1998-2008)
- Conduct preliminary content analysis – NVivo7.0
  - Type and frequency of interactions
  - Result of interactions (lethal?)
  - Perceptions of conflict
  - Media role in perception
  - Responses to conflict (culling?)
Search Results

Newspaper archive search criteria:
Coyote, and not hockey, Flames, Chicago, Pheonix, Mexico, USA --- other conflicts include Canadian forces special ops Afganistan … the Coyotes

N = 3022 – manual screening by title/content resulted in:
N = 780 – Primary, Secondary (reprints), Cols, L. Editor

Primary Articles N = 215
(Urban = 169 : Agricultural = 46)
Analytical Results

- Description of Interaction (1998-2008)
  - 24 Human-coyote interactions recorded
    = approx. 2.4 interactions PER YEAR
  - 70 Pet-coyote interactions recorded (41.4% reports)
  - 75 sightings

Incidents per Age

- Toddler (< 3 yrs): 8 (4?)
- Child (<10 yrs): 4
- Child (10-18 yrs): 5
- Adult: 7
Description of Interaction - Wounds

- 24 Human-coyote interactions recorded (14.2%)
  - scratches, puncture wounds, 4 cases no contact

- 70 Pet-coyote interactions recorded (41.4%)
  - large dogs no mortality, puncture wounds, scratches
  - small dogs and cats mortality in almost all cases
Some “interesting” reading…

- 5 coyote carcasses in Edmonton Chinese restaurant freezer (massive media pulse)

- guy arrested in Kelowna for drunk/disorderly conduct - shooting at a coyote with a nailgun while in a residential neighborhood
Statement of Cause of Interaction

- 70 articles – all pets injured were not leashed
  - 2 articles refer to animal being eaten “while on a leash”, when this never occurred in any incident

- Tracking media after the event - approximately 80% of incidents eventually identify attractants or hand feeding occurred prior to attack

- 13% articles identify attractants
  - One article (0.4%) cited the active removal of an attractant
Management Consequences

32.5% articles detailed an attempt or successful trapping or shooting of the coyote(s) regardless of threat experienced

1 article (0.005%) cited the active removal of attractant

(YET – lethal control does NOT solve the problem and most incidents arose because of deliberate feeding!)
Perceptions or Human Experience

- Fear safety of children, pets: 31%
- Fear of letting pet in yard/off leash: 57%
- Not natural in cities: 6%
- Pose a Disease Risk: 21%

Relative percent of times issue raised in articles
Media role in public perception

- Words used to describe a human killing a coyotes included:
  “put him down”, “coyote was caught”, “were shot”, “culled”, “will have to shoot a few”, “killed”, “destroyed”, “euthanized”, “removed”, “eradication”, “culls”

- Words used to describe a coyote killing a pet included:
  “marauding”, “killers”, “brazen attacks”, “tore a cat to pieces”, “unprovoked attack”, “attacking everything that moves”, “guts hanging out, necks ripped open, ribs picked clean”, “a death machine”, “snatched”, “ripping at her throat and internal organs”, “attacked”, “savaged a cat”, “an unreported plague”, “brutal attack”
Most common words describing coyotes:
- brazen
- crazed
- bold or boldness
- killer(s)
- mangy
- wiley

Most common word describing incident:
“attack, attacks, attacked”

*(used 176 times in 94 reports of interactions)*
Critical Perception/Consequence

- In 43/70 (61%) articles there were 59 references to the pet(s) by name - identification of pet as extension of self or family.

- In 14/70 (20%) of urban cases, pet owners describe their response to the killing or coyote-pet interactions as “traumatic”, one diagnoses of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The loss is real.

- In 11/94 (11.7%) of articles Canadians indicate they have been or feel ignored by governing agencies, or have attempted to contact and find solutions or response inadequate or uncaring. The loss is real.
[Judith Webster’s] cat, Neutron, dies 1 week after attack by coyotes in Vancouver, BC. (Jan 4, 2006). She charges:

City and province are "jointly and severally liable" for damages …caused by negligence and for breach of fiduciary duty by failing to maintain safe streets and adequately warn the public about coyotes.

The city in 1997 negligently adopted a policy of "co-existence" with coyotes and has, along with the province, failed to include coyote culling as part of their wildlife control programs.

Webster - seeking general and special damages, costs and court-ordered interest.

Court case lasted 1 year. No damages awarded…but 1 year in court!
Addressing Perceived Risk and Fear

Reports show average 2.4 people/year scratched or bitten by coyotes in Canada

- Over 460,000 dog bites per year in Canada
- Over 3.4 million dog bites per year in USA
- 200 people per year struck by lightning in Canada
- 7 people die per day in traffic accidents in Canada
CONCLUSION

- The potential for interactions causing significant injury or fatalities results in real fears amongst the public – when true risk is comparatively very low

- The control and supervision of pets and children in urban protected areas

- 20% of pet owners report symptoms of trauma - response by agencies should reflect a level of concern for these losses and address the issue with appropriate regard

- Why do management actions still focus on removal not mitigation??

- We need to educate
Questions?
## Description of Human Interaction

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