



Welcome to Cherry Creek Village North!

Our neighborhood is unique for many reasons and one of the most attractive qualities is that we border urban and rural habitats. You may think urban (city) areas are just for people and rural (open country) spaces are for wild animals. But CCVN sits on the cusp of Denver, Aurora, Greenwood Village, the Tech Center, and the large Cherry Creek State Park. We are considered a “rural/urban interface.”

Urbanization is a form of habitat alteration. CCVN envelopes the abrupt alteration of city into country. Wide Colorado high plains prairie habitats at Cherry Creek State Park meld into city homes, yards, pavement, traffic, and high-rise buildings. Motor vehicle and airplane noise collides with country quiet.

All neighborhoods, but especially CCVN, provide habitat for various species of wild animals that live in the resource-rich environments humans provide. In this packet you will find information on the most common wild animals and birds you will see around your CCVN house, yard, nearby open spaces, and overhead in the air and trees. You will learn about specific species, their lifestyles, family connections, seasonal features, how to observe them with knowledge, and realize to be a good human neighbor.

Common sense precautions will keep your family and pets safe. The city of Greenwood Village and our neighborhood of Cherry Creek Village North love our wild neighbors. Because our ‘hood rests between the Denver Tech Center (big buildings/parking lots, streets), Cherry Creek Reservoir and its State Park (developed natural habitats), you can expect to find a fascinating cross section of wildlife in and around your home in CCVN and Village Greens Field and Park.

The species most common in our ‘hood are: coyotes, foxes, raccoons, skunks, prairie dogs, rabbits, mice, rats, voles, snakes, hawks, eagles, owls, and many species of non-predatory birds including ground nesters and feeder songsters.

The City of Greenwood Village provides an excellent brochure on wildlife and it is free to residents. The Village website also features three excellent videos for all ages. Take advantage of the work our city has done to educate GV citizens at: <https://greenwoodvillage.com/1380/Coyotes> and <https://greenwoodvillage.com/1374/Living-with-Wildlife>

Let's Begin Our Education on Cohabitating with Our Wild Neighbors. . .

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Living with Coyotes

Coyotes are a canid (dog-like) species similar to foxes and pet canines. They are considered “meso-predators,” because they are the top of the food chain. They are omnivores and eat almost anything—seeds, fruit, mice, voles, snakes, birds, rabbits, and human refuse. They may also eat pet cats and occasionally small dogs, although dogs are usually considered competition for resources, not food.

They are highly intelligent and adaptable and are found in most urban cities around the entire continent of North America, except Alaska. Victims of extreme extermination efforts throughout the history of European settlement in the Americas, the species has instead multiplied and assimilated. Coyotes and wolves have been maligned in human mythology, even though they are close cousins of our beloved pet dogs.

Urban coyotes are key to keeping “pest” animals such as rodents, rabbits, and snakes under control. They contribute to their citified habitats by natural culling of the critters humans love to hate.

Seasonal Activity

Most wild city dwellers like coyotes follow similar seasonal lifestyles. The regular pattern is:

- **November, December & January:** Mating time for coyotes
 - Finding a mate, breeding, and denning to prepare for pups.
 - “Lone” coyotes are often spotted during the day as they traverse areas that intersect with humans. They are usually young males looking for their own territory.
- **February & March:** Pups are born and parent coyotes will stick close to their dens, hunt more actively, and be vigilant about protecting their den and territory.
 - If you venture too close to a den (which is always well hidden), a parent will “escort” you away. Parent coyotes will quietly walk with an intruder (*eg: you and your dog*) to make sure the intruder leaves the coyotes’ territory and the pups/den are safe. Some people think this is “stalking” but it is not—it is the coyote parents’ way of making sure their space and den is protected.
 - This quiet, staring accompaniment may be frightening but will suddenly break off when the invisible coyote territorial boundary is crossed. The parents will stop, turn, and go back to the den as quietly as they joined you.
 - If you find yourself in such a position, continue on your way without stopping, which may look like a challenge to the coyote. Make yourself look big by holding out your arms or jacket, and walk, don’t run. If you have an air horn, haze the coyotes to reinforce your own personal distance. Coyotes are extremely intelligent and easy to train to stay away from humans.
 - Avoid walking through the coyotes’ territory until the pups are weaned and out of the den. Respect their home area as you teach them to respect your own. If you are unsure where a den area is, stay on well-used established pathways. Do not venture off into natural areas, especially in high grass. Keep dogs on leash so they do not find the den through scent. Any other canid will be considered a serious threat and may be in great danger from the parent coyotes.
 - Any other animal that trespasses a coyote’s territory (*eg: fox, raccoon, other coyote*) will be quickly killed and left.
- **April-June:** the pups will be weaned and out of the den, and follow their parents on hunts. It is rare to see an entire new family during the day. The parents usually keep the pups hidden and traverse at night.

- It is extremely important to keep cats inside/safe and dogs on leash, especially if you walk in the evening.
- **September & October:** pups (usually males) may “disperse” or leave their birth family to find territories of their own. Some (usually females) stay with the family pack.

Hunting

Coyotes are “opportunistic” hunters, like skunks, raccoons, and foxes. They’ll eat almost anything and are called “omnivores.” Their favorite foods include critters humans consider nuisances or vermin, such as rats, mice, voles, rabbits, reptiles, and snakes. They will quickly clean a neighborhood of these problem intruders, and yet people often want coyotes removed from the very areas they benefit. Nationally, urban coyote numbers are increasing not decreasing, because we provide very welcoming urban habitats.

Coyote family members may separate for hunts but when reuniting, vocalize to each other in the joy of coming together again. Native Americans call coyotes, “the song dog,” and their vocalizations are rich and varied. Only one or two coyotes can sound like many.

Establishing and Defining Your Own Territory

Fences are rarely a deterrent for any wildlife, and certainly not athletic coyotes. They can climb, jump over, or dig under, most fences. However, there are “rollers” that can be installed on the top of fences. When a coyote, fox, or raccoon tries to get a foothold on the top of the fence to climb over, the roller spins and the animal rolls off outside the yard.

Another **inexpensive and easily installed tool** is wire rabbit fencing (available at any home improvement center) which can be stapled to the top of a six-foot wood privacy fence (inexpensive staple guns are also readily available). The wire comes in various heights but can be used to extend the height of your fence. It’s wobbly too, so no animal can get enough balance to climb over it. Tall wrought iron fences lined with chicken wire also keep outsiders from access. Chain link fences are the least effective, because they are easiest to jump over or tunnel under, so auxiliary fencing should be considered.

Lights can be a deterrent, but don’t work well for coyotes. Coyotes are so smart they quickly “habituate” (get used to) our habits and routines. They may even come to associate the turning on of the back porch light to the fact that your dog is coming outside. They don’t actively hunt dogs for food but do see them as “competition” and invaders of their own territory. Coyotes will even kill other coyotes if they invade claimed territory. Any canid species is a competitor in the coyote psyche. Strobe lights seem to work to some degree but do not depend on only lights to deter coyote access to your yard.

The best ways to avoid coyote/wildlife conflicts with your yard or neighborhood is to make your area a “less desirable habitat.” Do this by:

- Erecting physical barriers to remove availability of access.
- Not supplying resources such as pet food, water, bird seed, fallen fruit, or trash cans.

- ANYTIME you see a coyote, blast an air horn (hazing). The loud noise will frighten them and reinforce your own territorial boundaries.
- Removing low/dense shrubbery.
- Blocking entryways under outbuildings and patios.
- Keeping trash cans inside an outbuilding or garage.

By keeping coyotes out of your yard through making it inaccessible and removing habitat advantages you can prevent a coyote from claiming your yard as its territory. Hazing with air horns, lights, and yelling, will encourage a coyote to find a quieter, less disruptive habitat.

Protecting Your Pets

Dogs:

- If you see active coyotes observing you on a dog walk, make sure your dog is always on a short leash. Your dog is in more danger than you are, so do not allow him challenge the coyote. Wild and domestic canids protect their young so do not allow your ignorant pet dog to be hurt by a protective mom or dad coyote.
- Always carry hazing tools (air horn, whistle, strobe lights—*check out the “birdie”*-- <https://www.shebirdie.com/>) to train the coyote to avoid you and your dog. The hazing tools may also frighten your dog, but it is necessary to keep your pet safe.
- Coyotes are most active at dusk and dawn so do not allow your dog out alone in your yard at those times. Accompany your dog and carry your air horn. Small dogs should always be accompanied.
- Pepper or bear spray may be considered but is not recommended because it is easy for the wind to blow it the wrong way. Also, you must be very close to make contact.
- There are thousands more reports of dog bites than of coyote attacks so be aware of your surroundings, avoid known coyote den areas, and be prepared to change direction if you see a coyote actively hunting in an open area. Give the coyote the opportunity to hunt naturally and do not deliberately challenge it by invading its territory, by jogging by, or walking your dog through, an established coyote hunting area. Keep a respectful distance from all wildlife.

Cats:

- Cats should always remain in your house. Cats are on the coyote food list and cats often do not run away from an encounter. Cats remain cognitively partially wild and see themselves as the “hunter.” They rarely understand that they can be the “huntee.” They usually do not run, often “freeze” in place if frightened, and do not see the difference between their roommate dog companion and a wild canid.
- Cats are legally considered “free agents” and travel from yard to yard and so are at special risk from all wild animals and birds of prey. Unless you can wildlife-proof your yard or build a fully enclosed outside “Catio,” do not let your cats run free outside. Also most major cat diseases are airborne and do not require cat-to-cat transmission. It is safer all around to keep your pet cat indoors or safely enclosed.

Rabbits, Chickens, Ducks

- Any caged pet should be fully enclosed so wild animals cannot gain access to their pens.
- Small mammals and birds are “prey” animals and know it. Many can die of “heart attacks” from the extreme fear they may experience, even in safe outdoor enclosures. Keep their entire area inaccessible.

Children:

There are far more dog bites reported to law enforcement than coyote bites. Coyotes are rarely aggressive to people unless they are protecting their own families. Teach your children to stay away from wildlife—to observe and appreciate, but to not approach.

Your job is to protect your pet, child, and yourself, so do not arrogantly challenge, approach, or try to make friends with, any wild animal. Very young children do not see danger in coyotes if they have a pet dog. Teach your children to appreciate, respect, and love wildlife, while teaching them safety protocols. There are many area pet shelters, community and parks resources, as well as online information that you can tap into for instructing children on compassionate and safe lessons regarding the wildlife they live with.

It is illegal to feed wild animals (except birds) so do not encourage conflicts by providing unnecessary resources in your yard.

Live and let live but use common sense. Conflicts between people and coyotes are rare and usually unnecessary. Using common sense, utilizing respect, and eliminating human arrogance can contribute to living in peace with our fellow wild neighbors. All it takes is education and the willingness to protect children and the domestic friends you live with in your home.

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Living with Foxes, Raccoons, and Skunks in Urban/Wild Interface Areas

Other meso-predators that are common in CCVN share many characteristics and lifestyle patterns as the coyote. Few elicit the fear that coyotes do, even though each can be territorial and family protective.

Here are the most commonly sighted critters you will find in our neighborhood, and in practically all suburban areas:



Living with Foxes

These beautiful fluffy tailed creatures are also omnivores and eat almost anything, especially vermin that humans consider pests such as rodents and snakes. They also eat fruit, garden vegetables, human trash, and will attack cats, chickens, ducks, and other small pets if unattended.

Foxes are direct competitors with coyotes, raccoons and skunks. They have very small home ranges—usually within a seven-mile radius. They rarely live more than a couple of years due to constant threat from predators, automobiles, and disease.

Biologically related, their life styles are similar to coyotes and the seasonal cycles of mating, denning, birthing, and weaning of young are similar. Foxes do tend to be much more nocturnal however, but if resources are scarce or they become sick, sightings during daylight hours are possible.

Because foxes are considered “cute” by humans, they are often fed, which develops not only an unhealthy diet and but also dependency on people. People do not feel as fearful of foxes as they do coyotes and so human-provided resources such as food, denning areas, water, and property accessibility are more accepted. Conflicts between people and foxes are rare and not as anxiety-producing as those with the larger canid, coyote.

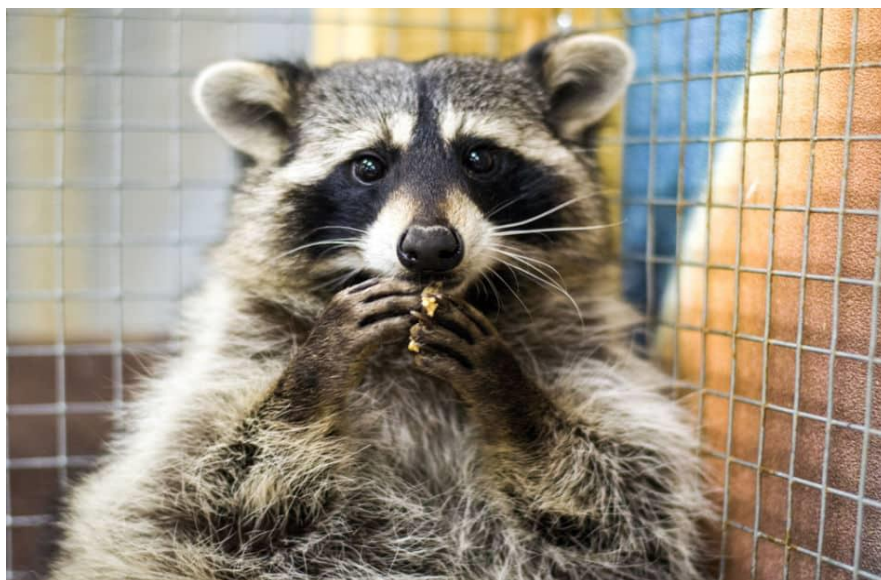
Because people rarely feel threatened by foxes they do not extend their fear of interaction to their children or dogs and cats. Foxes can be threats to small dogs, but are wary of large dogs. Foxes may attack and eat cats. Usually they run if confronted and hazing is not regularly used due to lack of human fear. That does not mean hazing should not be used. Foxes will protect their den and kits against threats. If they feel the den is compromised by people, pets, coyotes, or raccoons, they will move their kits to a new den.

Foxes repay people for their tolerance by eliminating many undesirable critters such as rats, mice, voles, snakes, squirrels, and rabbits. However, they remain wild animals and are best treated as such.

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Living with Raccoons

Fuzzy, masked, and nocturnal, raccoons can be fearless and aggressive. Raccoons are usually the size of small dogs but males can be much larger. They are strictly night hunters and prey upon many of the same animals that coyotes and foxes do. They compete with those species and are enemies of both.

Raccoons consume more invertebrates than vertebrates, and some of the raccoon's favorite treats are frogs, fish, crayfish, insects, rodents and bird eggs. They will also consume seeds, fruit, vegetables, and road-kill. Raccoons den in trees, ground holes, sheds, and urban drainage systems. They sleep during the day but in winter they sleep more, although they do not hibernate. In the wild they can lose up to 50% of their body weight in winter, but in urban areas they can maintain their condition on human trash, bird feeder waste, rotten yard fruit, and left-out pet food.

Raccoons are generally not social animals and do not interact well with each other except for the mating season during the winter. Sometimes related females will share dens but separate when kits are born. Baby raccoons are called kits or cubs and are born in the early summer. Females have one to seven offspring after a gestation period of sixty days. A mother and her baby raccoons are called a nursery.

For the first two months of their lives, kits live in their den and are weaned at around seven weeks. Mothers raise the young alone and can be ferociously protective. Raccoons are rarely frightened of any confrontation. When threatened, mothers will remain on the ground after driving the kits up trees or fences for safety. Because raccoons can turn their rear feet completely around, they can climb quickly, grip, and stay high out of reach easily.

At twelve weeks, kits will start to roam away from their mothers for whole nights at a time. They become completely independent at eight to twelve months of age. Raccoons live around two to three years in the wild, but longer in urban areas.

Raccoons can climb anything and can survive falls of up to forty feet. They especially seek out habitats with plentiful water supplies because they are clean animals and usually wash their food before eating. Their scientific name is “Procyon lotor” which means, “washer dog.”

Raccoon front paws are structured much like human hands and their claws are long and sharp, allowing them to tear apart cages or other protective outside pet enclosures. When confronted, they will stomp their front feet and huff, just one of over two hundred sounds they can make.

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Living with Skunks

Skunks are known as “stink badgers.” They were once considered part of the weasel family, Mustelidae, a group of carnivorous mammals that also includes martens, minks, badgers, otters, and wolverines. But based on newer molecular science, skunks are now classified in a family of their own, Mephitidae.

Common in CCVN, skunks also live in forest edges, woodlands, grasslands and deserts. They typically make their homes in abandoned burrows, but will also live in buildings, under patios, in rock piles, and in hollow logs. Skunks are typically around the size of house cats. They are not aggressive unless they or their kits are threatened. Skunks are nocturnal and forage for food at night.

Skunks are omnivores, and eat the same foods as coyotes, foxes, and raccoons, including berries, leaves, nuts, roots, and mushrooms. Many also eat small vertebrates like rodents, lizards, snakes, and birds, as well as invertebrates like worms and insects. Impervious to stings, striped skunks often prey on beehives, and eat both adult and larval bees. They are also immune to snake venom and eat poisonous snakes such as rattlers.

They do not hibernate, but they tend to be inactive during the coldest months in winter, when many gather in communal dens for warmth. A group of skunks are called a surfeit. For the remainder of the year, skunks are generally solitary, living and foraging alone. Mating season is one of the only other times when skunks tend to socialize, when they gather to mate. Their mating season is a little later than coyotes, foxes, and raccoons, due to shorter gestation times.

Female skunks give birth every year. Skunks have litters of up to seven kits in late April through early June. Their gestation period often lasts around two months and they give birth to two to ten offspring. Kits are born blind and their eyes are sealed shut until three weeks of age. They are weaned at two months. After they are weaned, they leave the den, and at only ten to twelve months they are able to have their own kits.

Although skunks are extremely adaptable and opportunistic, they have short lives and live only around three years. Disease, predators, and motor vehicle hits shorten the average lifespan in urban/rural areas.

The skunk's most memorable trait is its spray's smell. When frightened, skunks will shoot an oily substance from a gland underneath their tails with a range of up to ten feet. The scent from this gland can last for days, but is not harmful—although it can cause temporary and painful blindness in its victim. Skunks can produce spray as soon as they are weaned.

Most animals leave skunks alone. Skunks possess warning coloration—blatant black and white, a natural message in nature—to advertise their noxiousness. But if a naïve animal considers a confrontation, they will receive several warnings. Before spraying, a skunk will stomp the ground, dance, and then charge at an attacker. It will also growl, spit, hiss, fluff its fur, and shake its tail. If these behaviors do not deter, it will do a handstand on its front paws and aim its tail—directly towards the eyes of the enemy. Its scent can be smelled up to one-and-a-half miles away!

Coyotes, foxes, and raccoons occasionally do prey on skunks, however, owls, who are also mainly nocturnal, are the main predators of skunks—particularly great horned owls. Not only can owls swoop in silently from above, giving skunks less time to become aware and aim their defensive spray, but owls also have a weak sense of smell and are not put off by a mis-aimed shot.

Skunks are primarily nocturnal, and are not generally aggressive with each other or with other species of “safe” animals, like opossums and rabbits, who do not eat them. Their home ranges often overlap, and although they tend to forage alone, they sometimes live in dens with as many as ten other individuals, or even with other species, such as opossums.

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Living with Prairie Dogs

Prairie dogs are THE keystone species of prairie grasslands across the central and western United States. Their ecological contributions are far-reaching. Their intricate underground colonies create shelter for burrowing owls, jackrabbits, toads, and rattlesnakes. The bare patches of ground created by their grazing and burrowing attract insects that feed a variety of birds. And prairie dogs themselves are a key food source for everything from coyotes to hawks to endangered black-footed ferrets. **They support 136 other species** through their activities and lifestyles.

Prairie dogs are fourteen to seventeen inches in length and weigh one to three pounds. Prairie dogs can run up to thirty-five miles per hour at short distances to escape predators. Their short, strong arms and long-nailed toes allow them to dig miles of complex burrows, called colonies, towns, or coterie.

Prairie dogs live in tight-knit family groups called coterie. The average coterie is one acre in size with fifty to sixty separate entrances. Each coterie family has one or two breeding males, several breeding females, and the females' new pups. Males tend to jump from coterie to coterie—but the females stick together for life. Members of the same coterie will kiss or sniff when reuniting and identifying each other. Coterie may also include side chambers for use as a sleeping space, food storage rooms, and back doors for extra escape routes. Several coterie can exist near each other and become a prairie dog town or colony.

Their vocabulary is more advanced than any other animal language that's been decoded. Prairie dogs' squeaky barks sound simple to the untrained human ear. But recent research has found that those calls can convey incredibly descriptive details. Town perimeter guards stand tall looking for threats to the coterie. Their varied calls can communicate whether an incoming

*Information collected and provided by Resident Sunny Weber, Humane Educator/Animal Behaviorist, Author
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predator is on the ground or in the air. Prairie dogs can also alert that a human is approaching. They even have separate calls for domestic dogs on the prowl versus hungry coyotes hunting. From the alerts of the perimeter guards, the messages are quickly spread above and below ground to an entire family in seconds.

Prairie dogs tend to eat plants but may munch on insects occasionally. Prairie dogs vary their diet, so they are not reliant on a single plant for survival. Constant trimming of vegetation contributes to growth that is higher in nutritional quality. Shorter grass also helps increase visibility, allowing prairie dogs to detect predators quickly. Additionally, when prairie dogs eat grass, they make new space for plants like forbs and weeds. Prairie dogs will eat forbs in addition to their frequent diet of grass, and the change in growth and plant type brings more grazers, like bison and pronghorn, to prairie dog towns.

In late autumn, prairie dogs eat more food to fatten up for the colder season. Prairie dogs do not hibernate, but will go into a state of torpor. In **torpor**, an animal's body temperature, breathing rate, and metabolic rate all decrease. The animal becomes lethargic, but unlike a hibernating animal, is still awake.

In the spring, prairie dogs come out of torpor and resume their activities. In March through early April, prairie dogs mate. In contrast to many other rodents, prairie dogs mate just once a year. Females go into estrus for a single hour! The gestation period is just one month, and when prairie dogs give birth, they have litters of one to six pups. Pups are born blind and hairless. Pups stay underground for six weeks, then emerge from their burrow. Usually only half of their pups survive their first year.

Prairie dogs are cousins of squirrels and other biological relatives include groundhogs, chipmunks, marmots and woodchucks.

The resident prairie dogs near CCVN reside on the east side berm of Village Greens Field. An easy walk can provide you and your family with excellent wildlife viewing of this amazing animal family.

To do: rabbits, mice, rats, voles, snakes, hawks, eagles, owls, and many species of birds, including ground nesters and feeder song birds.