

## **Coyotes by Rebecca Lexa**

Many of us have heard the eerie howl of a coyote, but did you know that this is a relatively new phenomenon in this area? Historically limited to the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains and part of the desert Southwest, these adaptable canids spread up into Washington over the past hundred and fifty years as their main competition, gray wolves, were driven to local extinction. In fact the coyote is one of the very few animals whose range has expanded as humans have changed the landscape.

Coyotes feed primarily on small prey like rodents, reptiles and birds. They are very beneficial as they help control rat and mouse populations. Coyotes primarily eat meat, but will also consume small amounts of plant matter like berries, and they are not above scavenging roadkill! They live in small family groups consisting of a female and a male, and pups of various ages. Pups from previous years help to care for their younger siblings, giving Mom and Dad a much-needed break.

If you're worried about coyote attacks, fear not. Coyote attacks on humans are exceptionally rare, and mostly occur in larger urban areas where coyotes and humans are in much closer contact. It's still a good idea to keep cats, small dogs and other pets indoors, or outside only when supervised, especially at night. Make sure chickens and other livestock are in secure pens. Most importantly, do not leave food out for coyotes, whether that's pet food or a garbage can put out too early in the week.