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CEL2: Formulating Community Questions

Part One: Atlanta Coyote Project

The coyote, or otherwise known as and sometimes called the prairie wolf or bush wolf, was first described by Thomas Say, a naturalist in the early 1800's. Its binomial name, *Canis latrans*, translates as "barking dog" for the many vocalizations the species can produce. Between these two facts though, a coyote is neither a wolf nor a dog, but its own species within the canine genome. They are smaller than gray and red wolves, however they do have a common ancestor. Recent DNA research has shown that coyotes diverged from wolves and contributed to the domestic dog. Interestingly, there are 19 subspecies of coyotes, including: plains, mexican, El Salvador, southeastern, Belize, Honduras, Northern, Mountain, and Lower Rio Grande just to name a few. Coyotes' social groupings may vary based on the landscapes they reside in. Unlike wolves, coyotes are not dependent on their conspecifics, because they do not use the specialized hunting of large prey that wolves do. This requires the teamwork of a pack and strong social group. Temporary non-family groups can form but are rare; usually a social grouping for coyotes only consists of a reproductive female, a male and pups. The male normally hunts alone and will either bring back food to his family or bring them to the food. Furthermore, coyotes are a strictly monogamous species similar to wolves. As some may be able to tell at this point, coyotes are a versatile animal with the ability to adapt to new spaces, even those created by humans (Gehrt, 2007).

Research has shown that coyotes are rather successful at establishing territories in high density settings within cities and other urban areas (Gehrt, 2007). Furthermore, it is important to note that even though these animals adapt relatively well to living in areas with a lot of humans, they still tend to avoid any interaction with people. To do this, coyotes have shifted to nocturnal activity (Gehrt, 2007). With these opportunistic behaviors, it is not surprising that coyotes are the same way with their diet. Coyotes typically eat meat they have hunted either solely or in a group,

though they will scavenge for food occasionally, this includes insects, fruit and grass. This opportunistic feeding behavior may stem from when coyotes had to compete with red wolves who were their only natural competitor in North America. Red wolves were declared extinct in the wild in 1980 due to habitat destruction and human predation. There are programs, however, working to reintroduce captive-bred red wolves into the wild. About 35 red wolves now live on the coast of South Carolina. Until this program takes off, coyote populations continue to grow allowing more and more coyotes to adapt with the changes humans create (Atlanta Coyote Project, 2017).

It was not until 1970 that coyotes showed up in Georgia and took over. There is now estimated to be around 250,000 throughout the state. With this overpopulation of coyotes now and their flexible behavior, human-wildlife conflict has become a major issue. Coyotes prey on livestock, pets, spread rabies and may attack humans (rarely). The Atlanta Coyote Project works to educate the public about coyotes and how to manage and coexist with them. Similar to how humans dealt with red wolves, killing them is not going to fix the problem, though. In fact, Georgia Wildlife and Fisheries instituted a bounty on coyotes. Georgia hunters currently kill about 40,000 coyotes every year (Blankenship, 2018). The Atlanta Coyote Project presents several ways to coexist with coyotes. A study done this year showed how coyotes actually increase and promote biodiversity. As many as 12 mammals, 2 reptiles, and 22 bird species inhabited the same area as just a pair of two coyotes (Mowry and Wilson, 2019). As stated before, it is important to understand all the implications of a species before using lethal control to resolve a human-wildlife issue. Providing the proper knowledge will allow for a better understanding of how to coexist with wildlife. Mowry actually stated in Blankenship's article, "to try to understand whether we can alter the landscape in a way that benefits species we are interested in at the detriment of the coyotes' ability to prey on those species" as to find a way to manage the overpopulation other than lethal action.

Part Two: Interview Questions

Questions

1. What got you interested in studying coyotes {the Atlanta Coyote Project}?

2. Where did the inspiration for Atlanta Coyote Project come from? {Why do you think it is important to conserve this species?}
3. In an article for The Telegraph from last year, there was mention of altering the landscape to manage coyote populations. Is there any research being done on this? {do you believe this is a good way to manage the population? Do you have any other ideas?}
4. How do you think the reintroduction of Red Wolves will affect coyote populations?
5. In the years that the Atlanta Coyote Project has been running, have you noticed a difference in the public's perceptions of coyotes? {how do you help educate the public about the species and the Atlanta Coyote Project?}

Part Three: Action Plan

I plan to email within the next week. I feel confident that they will respond to me and hopefully we will be able to set up some meeting times for the interviews. If they do not answer my emails or phone calls or schedules do not match up to find a meeting time, I will have a few people as back ups. These are people who have been involved in the project I am interested in and have some knowledge on the topic. My questions may change for them if this is the case as they did not have a direct impact on the project.

Part Four: Consent Statement

I am conducting some initial information gathering on the Atlanta Coyote Project as a part of my graduate coursework in a Master's program at Miami University with Project Dragonfly. I have several questions and the conversation should take about 45-60 minutes in total. Feel free to let me know if you want to quit at any time. Your responses will be presented anonymously, and the report I produce will not be published or disseminated outside of my graduate studies.

Participating in this interview is considered consent. If you have any questions you can ask now or contact me at meyerch@miamioh.edu.

References:

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Mowry, C.B., and Wilson, L. A. (2019). Species Richness Within an Urban Coyote (*Canis latrans*) Territory in Atlanta, GA, USA. *Urban Naturalist*, 27, 1-14.