

Wildlife Hysteria: Nova Scotia's War on Coyotes

By Billy MacDonald, Redtail Nature Awareness
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In Nova Scotia, coyotes are designated "other harvestable wildlife" and can be shot or otherwise killed year-round with no "bag limit". There is also an NDP government-initiated subsidized trapping program, through a "pelt-incentive" of twenty dollars per dead coyote, for licenced trappers. We are informed that coyotes seen near communities, for example schools, "are to be captured and killed." A Department of Natural Resources press release of Jan. 21, 2011, states that "More than 800 coyote pelts have been shipped to market this season, a 51 per cent increase over the same period last season." Government media releases have spoken of aiming to kill 4,000 coyote!

We are two people living at different, relatively isolated, rural locations in Pictou County, in Nova Scotia. Each of us has lived with coyotes – really wild dogs – in our immediate neighbourhoods, for over twenty-five years. We oppose the coyote fear-mongering and hatred in Nova Scotia, which encourages a dread of being in the woods where coyotes could roam. One of us has had hundreds of youth sleeping in woods at summer camps, with coyotes in the vicinity and with no incidents, for the past twenty years.

Wildlife is "wild" and humans need to adapt to this. A measure of a supposedly civilized society should be human tolerance and co-existence with all other species, and concern for their well-being, not just for humans and their domesticated pets. We need a deeper ecological awareness. To elevate the trapper in Nova Scotia as the final authority on coyotes, as do government press releases and many media stories, is to disregard self-interest. It is equivalent to asking someone employed by the forest industry for an enlightened opinion on industrial forestry practices.

We see coyotes, along with all the other wild animals, as an extension of ourselves. We are often thrilled to hear coyote territorial family calls where we live, usually in the evenings or early mornings. We are thankful that the Eastern Coyote, which moved into our province in a territorial expansion in the early 1970s, and is now to be found throughout Atlantic Canada, has replaced the long ago extirpated wolf as an important ecosystem predator. The first documented coyote to be trapped in Nova Scotia, was in 1977. Coyotes are an evolving and extremely adaptable species. 'Our' coyotes have a larger body size than the Western. This is a result of interbreeding with wolves, on the coyote's migratory journey East.

Since the unfortunate death of a young woman, Taylor Mitchell, on a hiking trail in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, in October of 2009 – a first coyote-related human death for Nova Scotia – coyote hysteria has been on a roll. Taylor's friends described her as a person who loved nature and wildlife. Her own mother spoke out publicly against any killing of coyotes because of her daughter's death. Yet Taylor's death has been used to help justify a slaughter of coyotes. The media have been full of stories of aggressive coyote behaviour. However aggressive "domestic" dog behaviour towards cyclists and walkers, which many of us are familiar with, seems to escape a sympathetic press. For example, in Point Pleasant Park in Halifax, the scene of the latest media coyote scare, a person would have a much greater chance of a dog bite than the thrill of seeing a probable passing-through coyote.

We oppose this fear-mongering, provincial government-directed and media-stoked, towards our interactions with coyotes in Nova Scotia. It is creating a ripple effect which is negatively changing how we relate to Nature. There are “problem” people and “problem” coyotes, but we don’t go to war on a species. Do we eliminate all the dogs in a neighbourhood if the mailman gets bitten?

Both of us feel that it is crucial for humans to come into a new, non-dominant, and compassionate relationship with the natural world. There is a need for a fundamental shift in societal and individual consciousness, and a new equilibrium, with all the species who share this Earth with us, to have any kind of long term ecological and social future.

Sincerely,
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January 31, 2011

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Last updated: January 31, 2011