

Human behaviour is 100% responsible for coyote situation in Pine Hills Cemetery neighbourhood

Toronto, Ontario July 28, 2021 – The male coyote who has been the subject of so much attention recently **has been fed regularly by multiple people**. The feeding has been observed by staff and volunteers of Toronto Wildlife Centre (TWC), as well as by cemetery staff. In addition, photographers have been using food baits to get the shots they want; another form of direct feeding.

There is now a problem in the Pine Hills Cemetery neighbourhood; one completely created by humans. Toronto Wildlife Centre is working closely with City of Toronto staff, Coyote Watch Canada and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to come up with solutions.

Indirect food sources for local coyotes include food from overflowing garbage, food left out for a feral cat colony, food left in the cemetery at gravesites, and some residents who are leaving food out for coyotes thinking it will prevent them from eating their outdoor cats – which is a whole other issue. **An abundance of food sources encourages coyotes and other wild animals to venture into the neighbourhood in search of an easy meal.**

Feeding of coyotes alters their behaviour, typically resulting in animals who are less afraid of people and bolder around them. Feeders have been seen kneeling down and dropping food on the ground for the coyote; a similar posture to the one Ms. Liu was in when her pant leg was tugged on Monday; later described as an “attack” by media.

Small pets are at risk of predation by coyotes and other wild predators if not supervised closely while outdoors. **Coyotes do not understand that it is ok to eat a wild rabbit or groundhog, but not a cat or small dog.** It is incumbent on us as pet guardians to ensure that our beloved companions are safe at all times when outdoors. Leaving a small dog (or cat) unattended is no different than leaving a hamster unattended – they would all be in danger alone.

During the unfortunate incident caught on camera on July 20th, frightened 10-year-old Lily dropped her dog’s leash and ran. **Running incites a chase response in some coyotes** (as well as some dogs) and is discouraged in these types of situations. This also resulted in the small Yorkshire terrier being left completely alone with a wild predator. It’s unclear to us exactly why this interaction happened but what is clear is that if the coyote, a skilled wild predator, wanted to kill and eat the small dog he easily could have.

Coyotes by nature are NOT aggressive, vicious animals but rather are very timid animals who are afraid of people and would rather be left alone. When coyotes are handled at TWC – a regular occurrence – they are often shaking or peeing down their back legs out of fear of people. They commonly don’t leave the den box in their enclosure the entire time people are in the building because they are so afraid, even if it’s 16 hours or longer. Attacks by coyotes on

people are very rare (and often associated with feeding), compared to the vastly larger number of attacks on people by dogs and cats. But we don't run in fear when we see dogs and cats...

What is NOT helping anyone is some of the media coverage of this situation. While there are wonderful journalists we have worked with and continue to work with; whose work in getting accurate, balanced information out to the public is very helpful, unfortunately there are other members of the media who have been exacerbating an already difficult situation.

The liberal use of words like “attack”, “aggressive” and “stalking” to describe the coyote and his behaviour are fear mongering and only deepening the panic some members of this community are feeling. In addition, it has been our experience that **media coverage like this can result in animals being harmed or killed**; justified by the offenders through messaging they received that the animal is “bad”.

To those members of the media who have been running unbalanced, poorly researched, inaccurate and inflammatory stories with sensational headlines, **shame on you**. You are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

To members of the public, **please don't believe everything you hear or read in the news**.

So what is the solution?

1. We all need to take a deep breath and realize that this is a 30 lb. animal interested in people because he thinks he's going to get a food treat. He's not a grizzly bear. Informing and educating the public, especially in the affected neighbourhood, is very important – but important for all of us living in a green, nature-filled city like Toronto. We will be happier if we learn how to live with and appreciate the wild animals who live among us. They were here long before we were.
2. Those who cannot be educated (the feeders, the photographers who are using food baits) should be fined and prosecuted for the bylaws they are breaking, and the problems they have caused in this community – for people, pets and for the coyotes.
3. **We will work with City of Toronto staff, Coyote Watch Canada and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to change this coyote's behaviour back to more normal wild behaviour.** It will be a lot of work, but we are optimistic that it can be done. But the feeding needs to stop.
4. If residents see a coyote and are concerned, they should not run. If they have a small pet with them, they should pick it up and carry it home. They can also shout at the coyote or wave their arms around, acting scary. The coyote will be frightened.

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Additional information

- ❖ Coyotes like this one cannot simply be trapped and moved elsewhere. They are extremely hard to trap. It is illegal to move them more than 1 km. And most importantly, they would not survive long if moved out of their home territory into another coyote's.
- ❖ In Ontario, coyotes are not a Rabies vector species.
- ❖ The easiest way to restrain an adult coyote at Toronto Wildlife Centre is to drop a towel over his head, covering his eyes and mouth, and just hold his mouth shut. Easy. We would never suggest that members of the public handle a coyote this way since our experienced teams work with coyotes daily. We just say this to clarify that coyotes are not strong animals, nor are they aggressive animals.