

RESPONSE TO COYOTE PREDATION ON PETS

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Abstract: An urban coyote (*Canis latrans*) management program was initiated in Austin, Texas in January 2005 to address citizen's concerns that coyotes were becoming aggressive towards humans. Although preserving public safety is the fundamental foundation for the program, concomitant program objectives have evolved to include addressing citizens' high levels of concern regarding predation and attacks on house pets. From the citizen's perspective, it is unacceptable to ignore this issue, and demands for responsiveness have been heavy. The City of Austin's program has responded to this public concern in two ways. First, coyote conflicts involving pets are included in the reporting and coyote behavior scoring system. These encounters are then analyzed in terms of public safety impacts. Second, an education/communication program is implemented with a heavy focus on what pet owners can do to protect their pets. Methods for disseminating information regarding techniques and methods for preventing coyote predation on pets include internet websites, city-wide press conferences, education seminars in problem areas, and e-mail and postal mailings of information leaflets to complainants that outline methods that constituents are encouraged to implement to prevent pet predation by coyotes.

Key words: *Canis latrans*, coyote, coyote control, education programs, pet predation, public safety

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Austin and Travis County had no coyote (*Canis latrans*) control program in place for many years. As a result, Austin began to experience escalating numbers of complaints. One area of Austin began to report concerns about cat "mutilations", which after investigation were found to be predation by coyotes. Coyotes were becoming more bold, pets were being taken from patios/decks, coyotes were walking streets during the day, and coyotes were sleeping on lawns. Predation on pets was occurring in close proximity to pet owners.

Significant citizen concern led to the implementation of a data collection system which began tracking data in 2002. Data collection utilized the city 311 system. Citizens call 311 to report any coyote related

concerns or incidents. The control program began in 2005 and removes bold or aggressive animals only. Attacks on pets are included in the scoring but are not a reason for removal unless there is a possibility of a public safety impact to humans. Pet owners are very concerned about their pets and coyote predation on pets often feels (to the citizen) equivalent to a threat to human safety. Therefore, it is important to consider pet predation in the design of the program. Additionally, pet predation is another way that humans are providing a food source to the coyotes.

There is also a neighborhood education component to the program. The education component works with neighborhoods to change residents'

behaviors regarding pet management, for example, accidental or purposeful feeding of coyotes, etc. Significant emphasis is placed on pet management due to the high level of concern about pet predation. Methods for disseminating information regarding techniques and methods for preventing coyote predation on pets include internet websites, city-wide press conferences, seasonal press releases, education seminars in problem areas, and e-mail and postal mailings of information leaflets to complainants that outline methods that constituents are encouraged to implement to prevent pet predation by coyotes.

The program is jointly funded by the city of Austin and Travis County. The City of Austin also provides in-kind services for field support, education program, data tracking, data collection through the 311 systems, and project management/coordination. The program has been in place for almost three years and is considered successful because overall coyote aggression scores are down, number of citizen complaints are down, citizens are acting more responsibly in neighborhoods where education programs have taken place, and community-wide awareness of responsible behaviors is high.