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City's coyotes popping up again

Scarborough campus police report fox and coyote sightings

Article **Photos (1)**

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Ann Hui
Staff Reporter

After several reported coyote sightings in the city, wildlife specialists say the public should be wary for their pets, but need not be alarmed for their own safety.

On Sunday, a Scarborough woman told police a pair of reddish-grey coyotes had attacked her 80-pound chocolate lab along the Doris McCarthy Trail near Bluffer's Park, leaving it with minor injuries.



A coyote pauses in the northwest section of High Park on Saturday afternoon, part of a pair spotted and photographed by Star reader Rory McFadyen. Coyote sightings tend to rise in the winter, when foliage makes them easier to see, and the call of mating season combined with scarcer food sources prompts them to come out of the shadows.

Rory McFadyen photo

The next day, the University of Toronto Scarborough sent an email to students notifying them of recent coyote and fox sightings on the campus, suggesting they keep a respectful distance from wild animals. Robert Messacar, manager of campus police, said there have been at least two coyote sightings reported in the past few months.

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However, despite the much-publicized death of a 19-year-old Toronto singer apparently killed by coyotes while hiking in a Cape Breton park last October, Nathalie Karvonen, executive director of the Toronto Wildlife Centre, says such attacks are extremely rare.

Coyotes are naturally shy animals, she said, and generally afraid of humans.

"I would walk towards a coyote with nothing and not be concerned," she said. "I know it would be 100 times more scared of me than me of it."

The wildlife centre receives about 30,000 calls a year about coyotes and coyote sightings, but attacks are almost unheard of.

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Eletta Purdy, manager of Toronto Animal Services, said that in light of the Scarborough incident, a healthy amount of concern from dog owners is necessary, but cautions people against panicking.

Pet owners have reason to worry, she said, as coyotes may see smaller pets as prey. And because it's currently mating season for coyotes, larger dogs can be viewed as potential mates and aren't immune to unwanted attention, either.

Last winter, a coyote that raised alarm in the Beach area killed a Chihuahua and reportedly attacked other small dogs.

"Keep a close eye on your animals," Purdy said. "Keep them at your side at all times."

Owners should try to stay within a metre of their dog when walking in areas with wildlife, and avoid walking at dawn and dusk when coyotes are most active.

Winter is a common time to spot coyotes, said Brad Gates, president of Gates Wildlife Control, because food is scarcer, forcing coyotes further out of their normal habitats, and they're emboldened by the fact people mostly stay indoors. The lack of foliage also makes them easier to spot.

Gates said people nervous about being approached by a coyote should make noise and make themselves look big by raising their arms over their heads.

"It's an education process," Gates said. "Coyotes are always going to be part of the landscape. It's just certain times of year when they start being seen in our backyards."

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