



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Why coyotes like it in Sisters

A local television report the other night about coyotes living in Bend surprised some people. It shouldn't have. There are coyotes making a living all over Sisters Country, eating mule deer fawns, road-kills and stray and outdoor house cats.

Government trappers started killing coyotes indiscriminately over 100 years ago. They thought they could kill coyotes as easily as they did wolves, but the coyote has outfoxed them.

History has shown that killing coyotes indiscriminately only generates more coyotes, a scientific fact discovered by wildlife biologists in the 1960s. I was investigating stomach contents in coyotes brought to the Hart Mt. Antelope Refuge, looking for evidence coyotes were impacting survival of antelope kids.

Government trappers delivered every coyote they killed, whether from air or ground hunting and

trapping; even the puppies killed in "denning." I never did find an antelope kid, but instead, hundreds of mice, gophers, ground squirrels and rabbits, and once, a sage grouse.

On another table next to me a wildlife biologist was inspecting the ovaries of females, and was surprised to see up to eight ovarian scars on many of the females, which he interpreted to mean coyote populations were rebounding with a vengeance.

The relentless destruction of coyotes in Texas only generated more coyotes that eventually spread to Missouri, and from there to Ohio and from there to Chicago — where they're eating cats today.

Back in the "old days," predator trappers and sport shooters didn't realize coyotes are another breed of animal with instincts and needs far different than wolves. Simply put, wolves are territorial family animals and couldn't adjust to the methods used by trappers to kill them, and within a couple of years they were removed from not only Oregon, but the West at large.

The coyote was hit the same way, and their numbers dropped so low in the late 1940s and '50s that trappers were cheering. But mule deer were overrunning Central Oregon. Cougar numbers were also at their lowest, and there were no wolves. As a result, mule deer populations went sky high and they began

eating themselves out of house and home. That situation prompted the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Oregon Game Commission in those days) to open a doe season in an attempt to cut down the numbers of mule deer ravaging their habitat.

There were so many mule deer in the deer winter ranges around the south end of the Deschutes National Forest and into the Bureau of Land Management lands of North Lake County, browse lines in the pines, junipers and bitterbrush were all too distinct along Highway 31. At about the same time the coyotes of Central Oregon and all over the West said, "Enough is enough."

Coyotes became polygamists, with one male running with up to three females. Instead of one couple generating two to three pups, they began developing heterocous family units of three to four females with up to eight puppies, and within 20 years coyotes had begun to spread all over North America.

It was the same story for Arizona; trappers and coyote shooters there generated more coyotes that slowly spread to the suburbs of Los Angeles, north to Sacramento, from there to Medford and the Oregon Coast, then the suburbs of Portland, where they also eat cats.

Now there are coyote/domestic dog and wolf hybrids running around in Maine and southeast Canada



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

King of the countryside: Old Man Coyote.

that will in not too short a time prove to be a real nuisance in the agricultural and metropolitan communities, where livestock and domestic cats will be favored targets.

So, if you want your cat to be safe, bring it into the

house and keep it there. Of course it won't like it — cats are genetically engineered to kill things; that's why they like being out-of-doors. But that old adage, "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword" will catch up with them in time.

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For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life! — John 3:16

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