

LOCAL NEWS

‘Aggressive’ coyote encounters in San Rafael prompt education push



Steve and Jan Barlow of San Rafael walk their dog Sadie at Peacock Gap Park in San Rafael on Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2022. There have been reported encounters recently with coyotes at the park, including a dog that was bitten. Marin Humane has posted signs in the park telling people to be aware of coyotes and what to do if one is encountered. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)

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Marin wildlife authorities are ramping up efforts to educate a San Rafael neighborhood on how to live with coyotes after residents reported “aggressive” encounters.

The most recent run-ins — including an incident in which a dog was bitten last week — are occurring around Peacock Gap Park at the end of Peacock Gap Drive near the golf course, said Cindy Machado, director of animal services at Marin Humane.

“We believe there might be a den in the area,” Machado said, noting that could explain why they appear to be more territorial than usual. “Coyote pups that were born this spring are going out and dispersing into new territory, and their activity is the highest this time of year.”

Coyotes, which are highly adaptable animals, weigh about 40 pounds and reach the size of a medium dog. They are generally skittish and pose little threat to humans. But coyotes are still predators. Although rare, there have been documented attacks on adults and children. Coyotes have also been known to kill cats and small dogs.

A resident reported an encounter with two large coyotes around 6 p.m. on Sept. 5. She had one dog on leash and a puppy in her arms. One coyote lunged at the puppy, and the other bit the dog on the leash.

The dog is recovering with the aid of antibiotics, Machado said.

The same resident said her daughter was surrounded by coyotes at the park during the day while children were playing.

While residents have described the coyotes as being “aggressive,” Machado said she prefers the terms “assertive” or “dominant,” because they are exhibiting what she says are “normal behaviors.”

“When they display — have their hackles raised, strong tail up — they’re doing their best to try to trick us into thinking they’re going to get us, when in reality, they are probably more fearful at that moment than we are,” Machado said.

Wildlife officials are doing their best to ensure that residents are educated on proper “hazing” techniques, so that coyotes know to stay away.

During an encounter, loud noises and large motions are ideal responses in order to scare the animal away, Machado said. Residents should never try to pet or feed the animals, she said.

Denise Lucy, co-president of the Point San Pedro Road Coalition, said her group has been working with wildlife authorities to educate residents in the area.

Lucy said until this year, she has only seen coyotes a handful of times, and each sighting was at night. Recently, she saw a coyote walking and howling on the golf course. A few days ago there was a coyote on a trail leading to China Camp.

“The coyote did nothing wrong, it was just walking on the pathway, and I used an air horn and it scooted away,” Lucy said.

“I’ve lived here 25 years and never, ever had this problem,” she said. “We don’t want to create fear among the residents, but we want to make sure that people are aware and know what to do.”

The Marin Coyote Coalition, which in addition to Marin Humane, includes Marin County Parks, Project Coyote and WildCare [hosted an informational webinar last month](#) to teach hazing techniques.

Marin Humane also worked with the city of San Rafael to install signs at Peacock Gap park and trailheads to warn visitors that coyotes are in the area, and offer instructions on what to do in the event of an encounter. More signs are coming soon, Machado said.

Camilla Fox, founder and executive director of Project Coyote, said her staff is handing out informational flyers and door hangers in the neighborhood with links to resources on coexisting with coyotes.

"People need to understand that coyotes are a native species, and are a critically important species for a healthy ecosystem," Fox said. "For example, one coyote can consume upwards of 1,800 rodents in a year. That's free rodent control."

To that end, Fox discourages anyone from using rodenticides, which can inadvertently harm predatory animals, including coyotes, owls, raptors and others.

To deter coyotes in urban areas, there should be no outdoor food or water sources, and pet food and water bowls should be brought inside. Officials also recommend removing ripe and fallen fruit from yards and maintaining bird feeders.

Garbage, recyclables and compost should be in secure containers and taken out in the morning of pickup, rather than the night before.

Report coyotes or the feeding of coyotes to Marin Humane at 415-883-4621.

More information is at projectcoyote.org/resources/

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