**COYOTES Radio Segment – Master Naturalists (written by Ric Reichard)**

Hi, this is Barbara O’Hare from the Eastern Shore Master Naturalists.

Today’s subject is coyotes, one of the most adaptable canine predators in the world. The name “coyote” is derived from the Aztecs of Mexico who believed coyotes had extraordinary powers. Unlike their cousins – dogs, foxes and wolves – which can be found on many continents, the coyote is only found in the US, Canada, Mexico and Central America.

Here in the US, coyotes were originally found in the mid-west plains. They are now found in every US state and Canadian province. They were first sighted in the western mountains of Virginia in the 1970’s and are now in every county of the state. Northampton County was the last one to be populated by coyotes.

There are good reasons why coyotes are everywhere. They are omnivorous, intelligent, and can cooperate in packs or hunt alone. They can lure their prey to a hidden ambush and can walk on their tiptoes to be more quiet and stealthy. Coyotes can run as fast as 40 miles per hour, and have tremendous endurance.

They have a wide vocal range, and each sound is for a different condition. For example, the well-known howl is used to find one another. They also bark and yip, and have eleven different vocalizations.

Their vision is excellent. They see well in low light conditions, which makes them good hunters at night. We think they may be able to see 7 times better than we can under low light conditions.

Sense of smell is the dominant sense through which they take in their world. If a coyote detects your scent, it will generally leave the area, which is why you may never see a coyote, even if it is nearby.

Coyotes adapt to their environment through fluctuating birth rates. If there are many coyotes in the area, the birth rate is low; if the coyote population is small, the birthrate will be high. This is one reason why attempts to exterminate coyotes usually fail. Coyotes are currently considered a nuisance species and no permit is required to hunt them.

Although often considered a pest, it is good to remember that coyotes are very useful to farmers in rodent control. Their preferred prey is rabbits and rodents. They eat deer, but it is likely that deer meat found in coyotes may be from scavenging carcasses of deer killed by cars and other predators.

Coyotes are only one species of predators in a multi-predator system. Here in Virginia, that includes bears, bobcats, foxes and eagles. They exist in a complex ecological relationship to each other, and wildlife managers must look beyond the surface to manage these populations effectively.

So, you may not see our coyotes but they are part of our ecosystem. I hope you enjoy the wonders of nature here on the Shore!