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Oak Park Part of Urban Coyotes' Territory

Late-night sightings of coyotes are not that uncommon in Oak Park, as both residents and Police officers have reported what they believed to be coyotes throughout the Village. Given the numerous documented reports of coyotes along the lakefront, and a long-running Cook County study of their habits, it made sense that Oak Park would likely be within the coyotes' far-ranging territories.

But it wasn't until Monday morning that it was proven beyond a doubt that coyotes definitely are in Oak Park. That's when Police and Animal Control officers captured a female coyote after it took refuge under a deck in the 900 block of north Linden Avenue. Police apparently came upon the young female sunning herself in the alley. When the patrol car approached, the animal sprinted through a yard and under a deck. Animal Control Officer Jason Pounds placed a cage by the only escape, gave her a poke with a long pole and she was soon in the cage.

"Coyotes are said to be highly intelligent animals so I was surprised at how easy she was to catch," Pounds said. "She backed herself into a corner with no way out except as a passenger in the Animal Control van."

Pounds said his office gets several calls a month from residents who believe they have seen a coyote. But coyotes travel quickly and stealthy, making even sightings difficult, let alone catching them. Stray dogs often are confused with coyotes, too, according to Pounds.

The risk to humans is minimal, since coyotes primarily hunt small vermin such as mice and rabbits. While they have been known to take a small cat or dog, such reports are rare and have not been made in Oak Park. The presence of coyotes may actually help keep the rabbit population under control, a benefit any Oak Park gardener certainly can appreciate.

Still, residents need to be cautious, Pounds said, even though coyotes tend to be most active at night and avoid humans. Problems are most likely only when people feed them unintentionally such as leaving pet food out for the family dog or cat, or not tightly closing garbage containers that may hold table scraps or leftovers.

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2-2-2 Urban coyotes

As for the fate of the first coyote caught in Oak Park, Pounds said she will be released in a forest preserve a good distance from Oak Park. But she probably was not the only coyote that occasionally ranges into Oak Park in search of food, so future sightings and even trappings are possible, he said.

Researchers from Ohio State University have been studying coyotes in the Chicago metropolitan area since the late 1990s. Since then researchers say they have caught and tagged more than 200 coyotes, and estimate that there may be between several hundred and 2,000 coyotes living in the Chicago area.

"Coyotes are part of the wildlife that shares our habitat, just like raccoons, opossums and skunks," Pounds said. "As long as we are careful not do things that attract them so that they become a real nuisance, they can actually be beneficial. A coyote is a natural way to control rodents and other small nuisance animals. People are not at risk so long as they don't corner or provoke one. And the chances of that happening are pretty remote."

For more information on coyotes and other Animal Control issues in the Village call 358.5680 or email health@oak-park.us.

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