

The Oldham Era

Coyote Crossing

By Laura Hagan

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With telltale howls, tracks in the snow and a few sightings by residents, it looks like coyotes are making their way out of the wild and into Oldham County.

Some Oldham County residents have recently seen coyotes in their yards and neighborhoods and feel that seeing wild animals in rural areas is a little too close for comfort.

Barbara Rosenman, director of Oldham County Animal Control, said she's seen an increase in the number of complaints about coyotes lately - though she said sometimes a complaint is "simply someone seeing a coyote and being alarmed by its presence."

Crestwood resident Cindy Muncie said her teenagers heard coyotes near their Northwood East home about a month ago. When she let two of the family's dogs out the back door, they took off toward the howling noise.

And then she saw a coyote shoot across the backyard to get away.

Muncie's family has four dogs and three cats, and she worries that if their Goldendoodle puppy can squeeze between planks of their fence, "a coyote could get through, too."

Rosenman said coyotes are increasing in numbers and range, and they came into Kentucky during the winter of 1977 when the Ohio River froze. She said it was then they crossed from Missouri and have since been advancing east.

"They traditionally have lived in rural areas, but with the loss of natural lands, they have quickly adjusted to life in cities and subdivisions," Rosenman said in an e-mail to The Oldham Era.

Muncie's friend Angela Newton lives in Clovercroft subdivision in Pewee Valley and has spotted coyotes in the back of the subdivision.

She first remembers seeing one close to her home in September 2008, just before powerful winds from Hurricane Ike ripped through Oldham County.

Newton and her husband, Donnie, were washing their cars in the driveway and she saw something coming down the street, in the neighbor's front yard.

"I thought it was a dog, I was going to holler at it and see if it was a lost dog," she said.

As she got closer she saw it looked more like a wild animal and he quickly ran off.

After the windstorm knocked out their electricity, Newton said, her family slept with the windows open.

“Every night about the same time, you’d hear them. It sounds like a baby’s cry,” she said. “It’s really eerie.”

Muncie said her teens are concerned about coming home after dark. They enter through the back door, and they’re nervous about the possibility of encountering a coyote.

“If the girls are on the deck, the coyote could be cornered,” she said.

“When that happens, it could become aggressive.”

Rosenman said when residents feed deer and other wildlife during the winter months, this brings coyotes into their backyards. Coyotes often prey on deer, but when a deer is hard to catch, hungry coyotes will go after “whatever else is readily available, be it a pet like a dog or cat,” she said.

Muncie said it seems like coyotes are becoming more abundant and braver about getting into residential areas.

“It’s concerning,” Muncie said. “There aren’t that many small children around and the coyotes aren’t out in the daytime, but I did think about telling the neighborhood association.”

Her husband grew up in the country, she said, and wonders if the animals are getting overpopulated and there isn’t enough for them to eat.

Rosenman said coyotes are intelligent and adaptable and have no natural predator in Kentucky. She said they eat a wide range of foods, from fruits and vegetables to roadkill, dead live- stock left in fields, compost piles and even small dogs and cats.

She suggests storing pet food and bird feeders indoors at night to help deter visits from unwanted animals. She encourages pet owners to keep small dogs and cats confined at night, as well as small livestock.

“Deer feeding stations will bring in more deer and probably do more harm than good,” she said.

She said coyotes are challenging to trap and to translocate. She said coyotes don’t normally prey on people, but rare cases have been document- ed in other states.

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