

YOUR VOICES

Reality of coyotes' life cycle endangers pets

By Cliff Faver

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Life cycles are a commonplace phenomenon among the animal dwellers of our desert. One of the cycles we are now witnessing is the plight of the coyotes.

Two years ago the area experienced a very wet season. The abundance of rainfall led to a large hatch of quail and an above average crop of wild rabbits. When animals that are prey flourish, it follows that

the predator population also increases. The predator population growth, in this case the coyote, is usually delayed by a year or two.

At the same time the growth of the coyote population is increasing, the local area has been experiencing a dramatic increase in housing developments. This is why local sightings of these wild canines has experienced unprecedented growth in numbers. To add to an already complex situation, many people who are thrilled by these sightings have begun to feed the coyotes so that

they are able to enjoy the observation of these animals on a more frequent and almost regular basis. An additional, and perhaps unrecognized factor that results from such feedings is that because of the increased contact with humans, the coyotes lose their natural fear of people.

There are certain realities that are put in place with increased population and decrease in fear among the coyotes. Development results in a loss of natural habitat and range for these wild canines. The inevitable downturn in prey — rabbit and quail — population presents a scenario where something must give. The possibilities, however, are somewhat limited and to a degree predictable. Just how the "crunch" is resolved is the question. The typical life cycle of overpopulation

The more likely, and usual occurrence, is that disease will set in before starvation does. An important point to recognize here — the

diseases that affect the coyote population are not limited to the wild canines. Those same diseases will commonly affect other forms of wildlife and, in the vast majority of illnesses, will affect our domestic animals and pets as well. Some of

work to control the coyote population are: distemper, parvovirus, heartworm disease and rabies. All of these diseases spread readily with minimal or no contact between individual animals and are all generally fatal to the wild canine.

Recently, several coyotes have been removed from the Cave Creek area, each of which was diagnosed with distemper. This in itself is a strong indication that an illness preventable in our pet population. If your pets (especially dogs and cats) are not protected, please consult your veterinarian for the proper preventative measures.

Helpful hints:

- Do not attempt to catch or trap a coyote if it looks ill. Remember rabies is one of the diseases that we are concerned with. Call the appropriate authorities for removal of the animal.

Southwest Wildlife Rescue, 471-9109; Adobe Mountain Wildlife Rescue, 582-9806; or Sun Cities Animal Rescue, 972-8541.

- Keep your pets well vaccinated and on heartworm prevention.
- Do not feed any wildlife. Even though it is an enjoyable activity to see wildlife feeding, the consequences of doing so can be devastating and you could be the one to pay the price.

The concern now is how to ensure that the cycle has no or very little impact on our pet population. These are all diseases that are provided by members of the Desert Awareness Committee of Cave Creek. For more information on this topic, write the Desert Awareness Committee, P.O. Box 1722, Cave Creek, AZ 85331.