General Observations on Coyote Behavior

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The objectives of this study were to observe the coyote, *Canis latrans*, in its natural environment during the denning season. This was done in cooperation with Franz Camenzind, doing a three year study of the coyotes in Jackson Hole. Activity near the dens was best observed during the month of June when the pups were approximately two months of age. Later in the summer, the activity of the animals was observed at places other than the original den locations.

The period of pup behavior from June 1st through the 15th can be summarized with the observations made from a den located near the Elk Reservoir. The range of pup activity did not exceed a radius of ten to fifteen meters from the den entrance. The pups were seen drinking at about ten meters from the den. The observer was situated in the open about fifty meters from the den and was unnoticed by the pups, who were seen chewing on and playing with sticks near the den. Though they were not aware of the observer, they were alert and aware of the immediate surroundings. All escape was directed to the entrance of the den, and when attempts were made to disturb the pups, they remained on the mound in front of the entrance in a sitting alert posture. During the observation, an adult coyote howl was heard and there was no apparent reaction from the pups at the den.

The observations from June 15 to June 30 were made in part at three different den locations: Blacktail Butte, Elk Refuge, and Elk Reservoir. Escape behavior was again directed toward the den, but there was no hesitation for the pups to utilize the available natural cover such as sagebrush, willows, draws, ditches, low hills, etc. Although the reports in the literature state that an adult coyote will take to the water when necessary, pups of approximately ten to twelve weeks of age did not cross an irrigation ditch full of water (1½ meters wide by ½ meter deep) when pursued by the observers.

During the month of July observations around dens were harder to obtain. The dens which were previously observed were no longer occupied by the families of coyotes. This may have been due to the greater mobility of the pups, as several were seen moving with the adults, and the activity was not centered around the dens. One of the dens was probably abandoned because of disturbances made by the observers. After the coyotes had moved, closer observations of the dens themselves were made. Within about ten meters of the entrance there was a concentration of small pup scats. Within this radius there were several heavy concentrations of scat. Other things found near the dens included elk remains, sage grouse feathers, other feathers and bones, and sticks. Grass surrounding the entrances was trampled down, and in some cases the sagebrush was shredded.
Observations made from August 1st through the 15th were mostly of pups moving and hunting independently of adults, but still in vocal contact with the adults. Successful hunting was observed when the pups were alone as well as when the pups were with adults. The last two weeks of August there were more sightings of pups moving independently of adults though vocal contact was still kept with the adults, and the pups probably remained in the same range with the adults. By September the adults will have discouraged the family unit to the point of complete independence of the pups, though the pups (apparently litter mates) remain together.

The behavior of an adult around a den that was being observed was noted. The adult was aware of the observer's presence and at all times was watching. A distance of between fifty and one hundred meters was kept at all times, though the animals made a complete circle around me in several hours time. When making the circle, the adult was completely or in part concealed by the sagebrush and/or terrain. Though the adult came within ten meters of the den, it never went up to it. Finally, it lay down, still alert and watching, downwind from the observer's position.

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