

Cat Owners Warned About Coyotes

Wildlife officials caution pet owners about the cat predator's increased hunting during springtime.

Posted: April 10, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Virginia state game officials are warning cat owners that their cats might be more at risk of being attacked by coyotes in the spring than any other time during the year because coyotes are hunting to feed their pups.

Coyote sightings are common in the spring, according to Dan Lovelace, a district wildlife biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

The coyote is an opportunistic predator and feeds on small animals such as mice, rabbits, fox and cats. Domestic animals, especially small cats, might be at an increased risk during coyotes' hunting season. The game department cautions against leaving cats outside unattended.

Also, because coyotes' home territories may overlap, there might be more than one family group hunting in a specific area. Lovelace said that there is no way to gauge the number of the cat predators living in the area, but coyote populations have been increasing in the area for several years "and they are definitely here to stay."

Residents can help keep coyotes away from their homes by removing outdoor food sources, such as pet food for domestic animals, according to the game department. Cat owners also should secure garbage-can lids to keep coyotes from overturning cans for an easy meal.

Game officials also recommend that people defend their homes when coyotes approach. They suggest that people "yell, throw non-edible objects in the direction of the coyote or otherwise let the animal know it is not welcome," according to the department's website.