

# THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

## COYOTES

Coyotes scientific name *Canis latrans* means “barking dog” with its common name derived from the Mexican Nahuatl Indian word “coyotl.” The dog’s barking is followed by prolonged howls ending in a series of short yaps so familiar in the American West. Used to communicate with and reunite pack members, one call normally results in a haunting chorus of crooning canines.

Fastest of New World wild dogs, coyotes can attain speeds of 40 mph. for short distances. Running with their tails low (unlike the wolf that holds its tail horizontal) they can cruise at a steady 25 to 30 mph. for extended periods of time. Working in concert with other coyotes they will sometimes “dog” larger prey



such as deer or pronghorn – wearing them out then moving in for the kill. Birds, snakes, frogs, insects, fruit, carrion, and a variety of rodents make up most of this opportunistic feeder’s diet. They have been known to shadow badgers while they excavate ground squirrel dens – staking out the escape tunnels and snatching an easy meal. Coyotes also hunt like pointers, freezing and pouncing from as far away as fourteen feet.

With reduced populations of wolves, mountain lions, grizzly bears, and black bears, the coyote has little competition. Despite controversial trapping and poisoning, coyote numbers are doing well and continue to increase.

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*Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us.  
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