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Westport Canine Apparent Victim of Coyote Attack

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Westport News

Lilly, a small, seven-year-old Lowchen, was found dead Sunday morning, the apparent victim of a Coyote attack, according to the Animal Control Department. The dog lived at 18 Tupelo Road and belonged to Rand Rockmore, his wife Rae Lynn Ambach, and the couple's daughter, Elizabeth Rockmore. Rand got up around 5:30 a.m. Sunday and noticed Lilly in the yard. She had no visible external injuries. "We thought she was poisoned initially," said Ambach. "We couldn't really figure out what happened to her." Wanting some answers, the family had Dr. Charles Duffy of Norwalk perform an autopsy. It was determined Lilly suffered severe internal injuries. "The conclusion was that it was done by another animal," said Animal Control Officer Peter D'Amico. "We would say it's a coyote. The only predatory animal that would take on small animals would be a coyote." Lilly exited the family home through a doggy door probably an hour or more before she was killed, said Rand. She was found only steps from the residence. Normally, according to D'Amico, a Coyote will carry its prey to another location. "The only thing we can determine is the coyote got scared off," said D'Amico. With Coyotes becoming "more brazen and more out in the open," D'Amico said residents need to be careful about leaving their small dogs outside for any length of time, no matter how short. D'Amico said whether nighttime or daytime, residents sometimes let their dogs out in the yard and think they're going to be able to keep an eye on them "but they get preoccupied with other things and the dog is gone." Coyotes are often lurking on the perimeter and when the dog comes out, a coyote will take it and run off," said D'Amico. Since Lilly was killed, the Rockmore-Ambach family has kept the doggy door secured at night, as they are a little worried about something happening to their other canines, two Portugese water dogs. "We have been told that Coyotes don't attack bigger dogs but I'm scared now," said Ambach. "Assistant Animal Control Officer Joseph Saponare said coyotes can attack at any time and D'Amico told the Westport News coyotes will not attack bigger dogs and that there has never been a recorded incident of a coyote attacking a human. While many Westport homeowners have electric fences for their pets so the pets will not leave the yard, D'Amico noted that wildlife, such as coyotes, are not affected by electric fences and thus, pet owners should keep an eye on their pets at all times. "Never leave your pet alone and walk it on a leash," said D'Amico, who added that some residents are under the misconception that coyotes are only in certain areas of town. The same day Lilly was killed, a cat was found dead and it was believed to have been killed by a coyote. In general however, cats are more likely to evade coyotes or successfully defend themselves. For one, a cat can climb up a tree, unlike a small dog. Cats also have claws and "good defense," according to D'Amico. The Rockmore-Ambach family hopes Lilly's story will raise awareness so other pets in town will remain safe. "It's been very tough for all of us," said Rae Lynn. "It's hard to believe how deeply saddened one can be by the death of a family pet. She really was a part of our family and I think such an unexpected, violent death makes it worse." Some coyotes, said D'Amico, can be as big as a German Shepherd and weigh as much as 60 to 70 pounds. Lilly weighed just 12 pounds. When Westport was more of a farming town, chickens and small poultry were the primary targets of coyotes, according to D'Amico. With the decrease in the chicken population and the expansion of the coyote population, small dogs are now more at risk. "The ecological balance is nature after nature but when it's domestic it's a very sad story," said D'Amico.