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Coyote confrontation all too real for Ellicott City resident

07/06/06
By Mike Santa Rita

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Mel Jackson had seen coyotes only on television.

Then one paid him a visit last month.

Jackson was in his backyard on McGee Way, in Ellicott City, reading a newspaper at about 7 a.m., June 17 when Clifford, his West Highland white terrier, took off after a group of deer that was crossing into his neighbor's yard.



Mel Jackson's dog, Clifford, was severely bitten by a coyote on Jackson's neighbor's property in Ellicott City.

Jackson, 57, heard Clifford yelp and immediately ran to help the dog. He saw an animal run away from Clifford that he could not immediately identify.

The animal had a wild, unkempt gray coat, pointed ears and a pointed face. It came back across Jackson's property and disappeared into the woods behind his house.

David Tayman, the veterinarian who treated Clifford - and Jackson's neighbor - told him that the animal likely was a coyote, Tayman said.

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Jackson added that he believes his subsequent research on the Internet has proved that.

"I'm willing to bet my home that it was a coyote," Jackson said June 29.

Tayman, 60, who owns Columbia Animal Hospital, primarily treated Clifford, who survived the attack, with booster shots to prevent possible rabies. The dog needed no stitches - though one of six puncture marks in his neck came dangerously close to the jugular vein, Jackson said.

Tayman said Clifford was the first animal he has treated for a coyote attack in his 32 years as a veterinarian in Howard County.

Jackson said he believed coyotes were found only out west.

"Other than on 'The Lone Ranger' that's the only time I've seen a coyote," he said.

Migration to urban areas

Coyotes have called Maryland home since about 1972, when they began to migrate into the state's rural regions from Pennsylvania and Virginia, said Robert Colona, furbearer project leader for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, which tracks the animals.

Coyotes are now found in every Maryland county, he said, adding that the state does not keep year-to-year population numbers on coyotes.

The most recent data on coyotes in Howard shows 12 reported sightings in 2003 and eight in 2004, Colona said.

Gary Arthur, director of the county's Department of Recreation and Parks said that his department has received word of about four coyote sightings in county parks this year, including those in the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area, near Clarksville; , Rockburn Branch Park, in Elkridge; , Centennial Park, in Ellicott City; and Alpha Ridge Park, in Marriottsville.

"They are getting to be more plentiful in these urban areas," Arthur said.

The parks department has no policy to deal with coyotes but probably will institute one if sightings of the animal increase, as he anticipates, Arthur said.

Officials also likely would launch a campaign designed to educate the public on coyotes and how to handle them, he said.

Keep pets close

Coyotes tend to be more aggressive in urbanized areas, where they are not hunted and trapped, Colona said.

Highly adaptable, the animals can sleep anywhere, on

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woodpiles, under decks, in the woods, using dens only when they have young.

"Everything related to humans is a food source, from their dogs and cats, to their dog food and cat food and the garbage sitting on the front stoop," Colona said, adding that officials never have received a report of a coyote attacking a person in Maryland.

One way to prevent a run-in with a coyote is to keep a close eye on pets, said Lynn Nesor, field supervisor for Howard County Animal Control.

"I would suggest that people not have their pets outside unattended in general," she added.

Today, Clifford continues to sit with Jackson as he reads his morning newspaper. And Jackson keeps his eyes peeled for coyotes, adding that he's prepared to chase them from his property, if necessary.

"After that ordeal, that's not an animal I would prefer to share company with," he said.

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