

Bobcats and Coyotes in Clear Lake Forest?

Aside from being a quaint, older neighborhood in the coastal area of Southeast Houston, Clear Lake Forest is situated in the center of a unique combination of ecosystems that unfortunately is rapidly diminishing. Adjacent to the largest urban wildland in the United States, Armand Bayou Nature Center, and an ever-increasing human population, interactions between humans and wildlife are expected to rise. A term used by wildlife biologists and professionals for these interactions is known as the *human-wildlife interface*. Recently, there have been concerns of coyotes and bobcats wondering the streets of our neighborhood so my personal goal with this article is assist our neighbors in differentiating domestic dogs and cats with coyotes and bobcats, respectively, as well as some tips to ensure the safety of residents and their beloved pets.

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*)

Description

The bobcat gets its name for the shortened or “bobbed” tail it has and along with the tufts of hair on the tips of the ears and ruffs of hair beneath them, are the key features which distinguish the species from domestic cats. Bobcats are also significantly larger than pet cats growing up to 2 feet tall and weigh between 15-40 lbs! (Image 1.)



Image 1. Adult bobcat. Note the bobbed tail, tufts of hair on the ears and long hair (ruffs) under the ears. Stock Image.

Behavior

Although a naturally solitary species, home ranges often overlap resulting in multiple individuals often being present in an area. Bobcats are considered a *crepuscular* species and are often seen between a few hours before sunset into about midnight and then again from pre-dawn until mid-morning however, as the temperatures cool, bobcats become more *diurnal*, being more active during the day.

Diet

Bobcats' diets consist of mainly small mammals like squirrels and rabbits as well as eggs, reptiles, insects, and fish however, when forced into an urban area like Clear Lake Forest, bobcats have been known to adapt their diets to include chickens, food scraps in the trash, and even small pets.

What should if I encounter a bobcat?

- 1) In the event you encounter a bobcat, the number one rule is to REMAIN CALM.
- 2) Loud noises and splashing the animal with water will be your best bet in deterring the animal from approaching.

****Bobcats rarely attack humans however, running away with a fast pace increases the risk of engaging the animal's hunting instincts****

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Description

Adult coyotes weigh and average of 40 lbs and range from 2-4 feet at the shoulders. Coloration varies by individual however, the typical colors seen in coyotes in this region are tan to brown, dusky gray, and red. The key differences

between coyotes and domestic dogs are the relatively large ears compared to their heads, bushy tails, generally scruffy coat, and golden eyes. (Image 2.)

Behavior

Coyotes are a social species however are not dependent upon other individuals as are wolves. Occasionally, coyotes may socialize with other individuals for companionship or when hunting large prey such as deer, however, do not regularly seek the latter as a food source such as their wolf counterparts. Coyotes use their sense of smell (olfactory) as their main hunting tool.



Image 2. Adult coyote. Note the large ears, golden eyes, and reddish-gray-tan coat. Photo credit: Bill Reaves, TPWD

Diet

Coyotes prefer medium to small mammals and rodents (fawns, squirrels, rabbits), carrion (dead animals), fruit, and insects. Coyotes forced into an urban area like Clear Lake Forest will also prey on small pets, chickens, livestock, and birds. Due to the specie's strong sense of smell, food scraps, pet food, and pet urine/feces may also attract coyotes.

What should I do if I encounter a coyote?

- 1) If you encounter a coyote, rule number one is to REMAIN CALM!
- 2) Maintain eye contact and leash or pick up any dogs
- 3) Make lots of noise, maintain eye contact
- 4) Throw any objects within reach and maintain eye contact
- 5) Retreat SLOWLY and maintain eye contact

****Unlike bobcats, coyotes are more likely to be habituated to humans therefore are more likely to attack if you run. Report any aggressive coyotes****

The possibility of an interaction with either of these species or wildlife in general is always present however, the best way to reduce these possibilities are through preventative measures which are provided here. Remember, these are NOT 100% wildlife-proof steps but will assist in keeping you and your beloved four-legged family members safe!

- 1) Bring in your pets during times when bobcats and coyotes are most active (pre-dawn-early morning and dusk-after sunset). If those times conflict with your routine/schedule, keep an eye out while your pets are “answering nature’s call”
- 2) Clean up after your pet, especially in the early morning and evening when coyotes are most active to avoid attracting them via scent. Remember, coyotes are territorial and will always investigate if they are in the area!
- 3) Keep any pet food inside or completely sealed if kept outside.
- 4) Keep food scraps away from where your pets frequent outside. Do not allow wildlife to associate an easy meal with your pets!
- 5) NEVER NEVER NEVER feed any wildlife that you may encounter! This builds an association with humans often leading to a dependence on us as a food source!

I have also provided a list of resources of certified wildlife professionals and agencies in the event you encounter any kind of wildlife.

- 1) Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Game Warden:
 - Houston Regional Office – (281) 931-6471
 - Sheriff’s Office – (713) 755-6044
- 2) Seabrook Police Department (Animal Control) – (281) 291- 5610

You may also find a comprehensive list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators online at www.tpwd.texas.gov

About the Author

Camilo (Cam) Rojas is a Marine combat veteran and a long-time resident of Clear Lake Forest and is the oldest son of Camilo and Amy Rojas who are current residents. Cam moved to Nacogdoches to pursue an education at Stephen F. Austin State University and obtained his BS of Forestry with an emphasis in Forest Wildlife Management and is currently pursuing a MS in Forestry Resource Communications. Upon completion of his Master's, Cam will be obtaining a PhD in Forestry for a career as a conservation biologist. Cam has field experience with a variety of native Texas wildlife species, conducted urban wildlife management workshops, given lectures on natural resource management, and is currently working on research collaborations with the CLFCA and Armand Bayou Nature Center. Aside from academics and science, Cam is an avid outdoorsman and can often be found fishing at Baronridge Park with his brother and sister when he is home visiting his family.

