

Coyote...from Page 1A

Plains region prior to North American settlement, the coyote has migrated and colonized the entire U.S.

Coyotes often assume the role of top predator in many ecosystems where other species, such as the gray wolf and mountain lion, historically held that status prior to removal or local extinction.

Ranging anywhere from 25 to 35 pounds, coyotes exhibit a wide range of color – red, blonde, black or gray mix – and are socially monogamous creatures, typically rearing four to seven pups per litter with their mate.

However, these animals have a unique breeding gene that helps to increase species survival odds when times call for it.

“Coyotes are very unique,” said Webster. “This is a trait that is mostly known to the Canidae family, in that they have what we call ‘compensatory breeding.’

“That just means that their breeding is dependent upon the density of animals on the landscape. So, typical

for coyote populations is that every pair will have anywhere from four to seven pups per litter on average.

“However, in times when they are experiencing great environmental pressures that are driving numbers down or suppressing that density on the landscape so there are fewer coyotes, they have a trait where they can start having larger litter sizes, so they can quickly repopulate their numbers.

“When that happens, they can have anywhere from 10 to 12 pups in one litter.”

Both parents participate in raising the pups, though only until the next breeding season, and then that litter is sent out to fend for itself.

This often means consuming small game, such as squirrels and raccoons, as well as fruit and berries, like blueberries and persimmons.

While many may see coyotes as problematic, especially livestock owners who become inadvertent meal providers for these animals, coyotes actually play an important role in maintaining



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vermin and raccoon populations, according to Webster.

“Impacts that we definitely know from coyotes is that they definitely are controlling vermin populations,” said Webster. “Their bread and butter are small animals like mice,

rabbits, rats, squirrels and smaller mammals like that.

“And those animals are known to carry some nasty diseases and plagues. So, they do a good job of controlling those populations.”

Continued Webster: “There’s also research that shows coyotes can help control

raccoon populations. Raccoons are the No. 1 carriers of rabies in this area, so controlling this population is actually considered a benefit that coyotes can bring to the region.”

As far as managing coyotes on private and public lands, the state of Georgia offers several options for landowners who find the animals to be a nuisance.

Coyotes can be trapped year-round in Georgia, though a trapping license is required, and hunting of coyotes is legal on private land year-round, both during the day and night.

Georgia also hosts a special coyote challenge each year from March 5 until Aug. 31, where anyone who kills five coyotes in a month can be entered to win a lifetime hunting license.

While these management tactics are an option, due to the compensatory breeding genes in coyotes, it’s unlikely they will lead to a long-term decrease in animal populations, and Webster advised alternatives to killing the animals.

According to Webster, to coexist with coyotes, individuals should not feed

coyotes – even unintentionally by leaving unattended food outdoors overnight.

Also, be sure to remove attractants such as pet food, compost or fallen fruit, supervise small outdoor pets, keep coyotes wary, and only appreciate coyotes from afar.

“If you do come up on a coyote, make yourself big,” said Webster. “To them, you’ll look like a bear, and they’ll tuck tail and run.

“When it comes to coyotes, the majority of the time they don’t want to interact with you. They’re not aggressive unless they feel threatened, so make yourself known as the larger species, and they’ll leave you alone.

“And remember, coyotes aren’t going anywhere and their numbers aren’t going to be dwindling anytime soon. It’s in our best interest to learn as much as we can about these creatures, and to best learn how to coexist and share the same habitat.”

For more information on Georgia laws regarding coyote trapping and hunting, visit the Georgia Department of Natural Resources website at GADNR.org.