



S.F. neighborhood on edge after coyote pack moves in, kills cats

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle | September 17, 2015 | Updated: September 18, 2015 11:09am



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Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle



Mary Paglieri, a coyote expert for the Little Blue Society, center (white shirt) talks with neighbors as she investigates reports of a pack of coyotes scaring residents of the Ingleside Terraces neighborhood in San Francisco, Calif., on Thursday, September 10, 2015.

Predators are lurking in the darkness of San Francisco’s Ingleside Terrace, slinking through alleyways and across dirt lots.

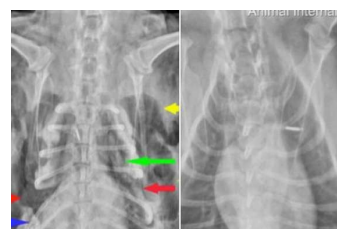
Coyotes have taken to popping out of the shadows in the upscale neighborhood, creating a furor among the many pet owners and parents, who say the wily canines have already killed at least three cats and are waltzing around on the streets and through people’s yards like they own the place.

As coyotes migrate more and more into Bay Area cities, the sightings in Ingleside Terrace — at least a dozen since July — are testing the idea that humans and the canines can coexist.

“What got me concerned was all of these sightings and a cat being dismembered on someone’s front lawn,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Annemarie Conroy, who lives on Paloma Avenue.

The former San Francisco supervisor is

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especially concerned about two toddlers who play across the street from her house. Some neighbors spoke of hiring trappers to get rid of the coyotes, but the idea created such an uproar on an online neighborhood forum that it was dropped.



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Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle

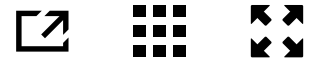


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Mary Paglieri, a coyote expert for the Little Blue Society, looks for coyote tracks in a dirt driveway where she had seen them previously, as she investigates reports of a pack of coyotes scaring residents of ... [more](#)

Conroy and her neighbors have called police, city officials and Supervisor Norman Yee for help, but city policy is to educate people about ways to get along with the visitors.

“I don’t want to make it sound like it’s not an issue. It is, but these are wild animals,” said Vicky Guldbeck, the operations manager for San Francisco Animal Care and Control, explaining that it is against regulations to trap, relocate or kill such animals unless they are an imminent threat to humans.

“They are doing what wild animals do,” she said. “The message we want to put out there is we have to live amongst these animals and they have to live with us, and we have to figure out what’s safe for everybody.”

The city’s coexistence principle has frustrated Conroy and many of her neighbors, who want San Francisco officials to develop a more comprehensive plan to deal with urban coyotes.

Not part of the family

“I worry about kids, cats, small dogs, my dog,” Conroy said, looking worriedly at her fluffy black 13-year-old rescue dog, Flannagan. “The idea that we invite them in to be part of the family is not workable.”

It’s an issue that has garnered considerable attention recently in San Francisco as the number of coyotes has exploded. The expansion of coyote territory is a Bay Area-wide phenomenon, but the migration from the suburbs into the city over the past decade has been remarkable.

Sightings of the clever carnivores began in 2004 in the Presidio, creating excitement and a



John Blanchard / The Chronicle



good deal of puzzlement over how the animals got there. Answers came shortly after the first encounter, when Golden Gate Bridge officials looked at a video that showed a coyote trotting across the bridge in the dead of night.

Genetic testing of two coyotes that were shot by federal authorities in Golden Gate Park in 2007, after they attacked dogs, confirmed that the creatures came from the north.

Coyotes have since been reported in Glen Park, Bernal Heights, St. Francis Wood and Lake Merced, and on the Olympic Club golf course. A 2-year-old bichon frise is recovering from injuries he suffered on Aug. 26 when he was attacked by one of five coyotes that surrounded his owner during a morning walk in Stern Grove.

In Ingleside Terrace, tensions are so high that the neighborhood association called in Mary Paglieri, a specialist in human-animal conflict who has prepared a plan to drive out the yipping invaders. She believes the drought has so reduced the primary prey of coyotes — mice and voles — that they have been forced to look for food in city neighborhoods.

“These coyotes are definitely expanding their home range,” said Paglieri, a behavioral ecologist, as she perused the dirt one evening last week for paw prints and scat, or feces, on a back lot where two raccoons were recently seen chasing away a coyote.

Drought blamed



Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle



Mary Paglieri, a coyote expert for the Little Blue Society, greets Flannagan as she investigates reports of a pack of coyotes scaring residents of the Ingleside Terraces neighborhood in San Francisco, Calif., on Thursday, September 10, 2015. Paglieri says she has a system, developed after years of working with wild animals, including elephants in Africa, that works to remove wild animals from neighborhoods. It is an issue more and more residents of San Francisco are dealing with as coyotes expand into urban areas. The drought has made things worse, reducing prey species like mice and voles.

“The local wildlife population is really struggling right now on account of the prolonged drought,” she said. “The natural food supply is shrinking all along the food chain. Coyotes are traveling greater distances and becoming more visible in their search for resources.”

Ingleside Terrace is a cluster of 750 homes in the southwestern part of San Francisco, bordered by Ocean Avenue to the north and Junipero Serra Boulevard to the west. Paglieri, who has seen two coyotes during her nighttime excursions, believes a family of three or four coyotes that came from the Lake Merced area has established an east-west corridor through the neighborhood, hunting raccoons and taking cats when they run across them.

“This is where we found scat, right on the front lawn,” she said, gesturing toward a large yellow house. She said coyotes deliberately deposit scat in areas where they have found a food supply, a tactic that she called resource marking. “There could be cats moving through here at night. That would interest them. There was talk that there is a feral cat population here.”

Pagliari intends to “redirect and disperse” the animals using behavior-modification techniques. She is urging people to leash their dogs, keep their cats inside and secure their garbage. Nobody should ever feed a coyote, she said, or encourage a dog to play with one, which animal care officials said has happened before.

They were here first

Coyotes are actually native to San Francisco, where the fossil record shows they were plentiful until roughly the time of the Gold Rush, when they were killed off. An article in the Daily Alta California on Sept. 15, 1860, told of a coyote that sneaked into the city and ran off with a hen.



Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez, The Chronicle



Mary Paglieri, a coyote expert for the Little Blue Society, measures Flannagan for a safety collar after investigating reports of a pack of coyotes scaring residents of the Ingleside Terraces neighborhood in San Francisco, Cali., on Thursday, September 10, 2015. Paglieri says she has a system, developed after years of working with wild animals, including elephants in Africa, that works to remove wild animals from neighborhoods. It is an issue more and more residents of San Francisco are dealing with as coyotes expand into urban areas. The drought has made things worse, reducing prey species like mice and voles.

“Time was, and not long ago either, when such varmints loped fearlessly among the chaparral where now stand blocks of buildings,” the story said.

Times have changed, and the canines’ place in the ecosystem is now well understood. Wildlife experts say coyotes keep rodent populations down and other mesocarnivores — like foxes, skunks and raccoons — in check, which in turn helps songbird and ground-nesting bird populations.

Still, the animals are looked down upon as vermin by many people, even though just one fatal attack on a human has been documented in the United States. The 1981 case occurred in

Glendale (Los Angeles County), when 3-year-old Kelly Lynn Keen was dragged away from her house before her father could rescue her. It turned out the family had been feeding coyotes in the backyard.

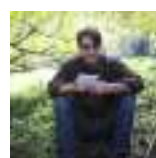
The ruckus in Ingleside Terrace isn't the first time San Francisco residents have reached for their pitchforks. Encounters with the furry four-leggers in Golden Gate Park a few years ago created such a fuss that city officials cordoned off trails and put up "Be Coyote Aware" signs along John F. Kennedy Drive, where a coyote family had set up housekeeping.

There have been sporadic instances of aggressive behavior, including a few reported cases of coyotes charging pedestrians and pets in San Francisco, but experts agree the animals are not normally assertive toward humans or dogs unless they are defending their dens during pup-rearing season, which lasts from April through August.

They are, nevertheless, a threat that most residents would prefer to live without, said Mark Scardina, the president of the Ingleside Terraces Homes Association.

"Whether it's pets or small children, we don't want anything serious to happen," Scardina said. "We're just interested in having them not make our neighborhood their home range."

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