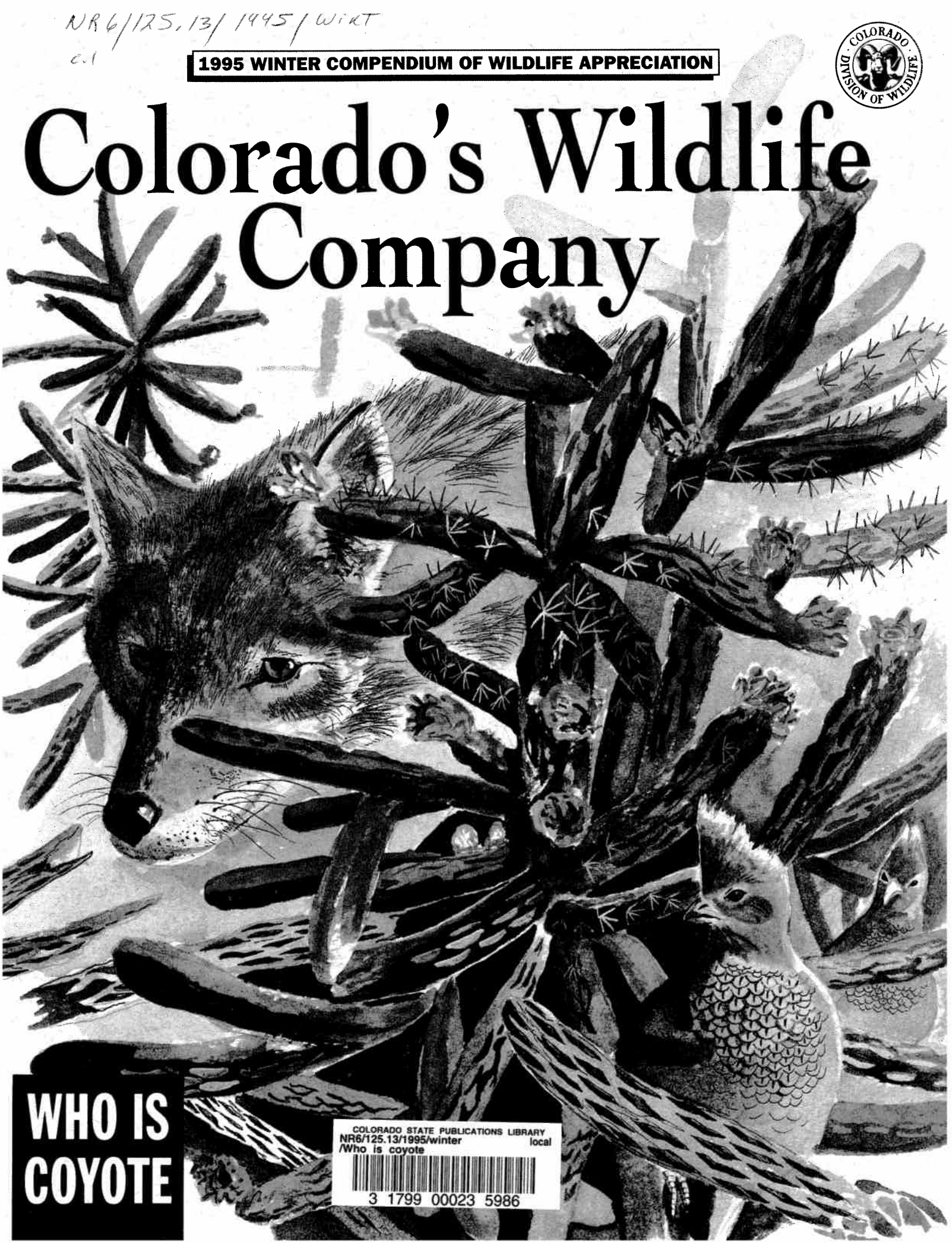
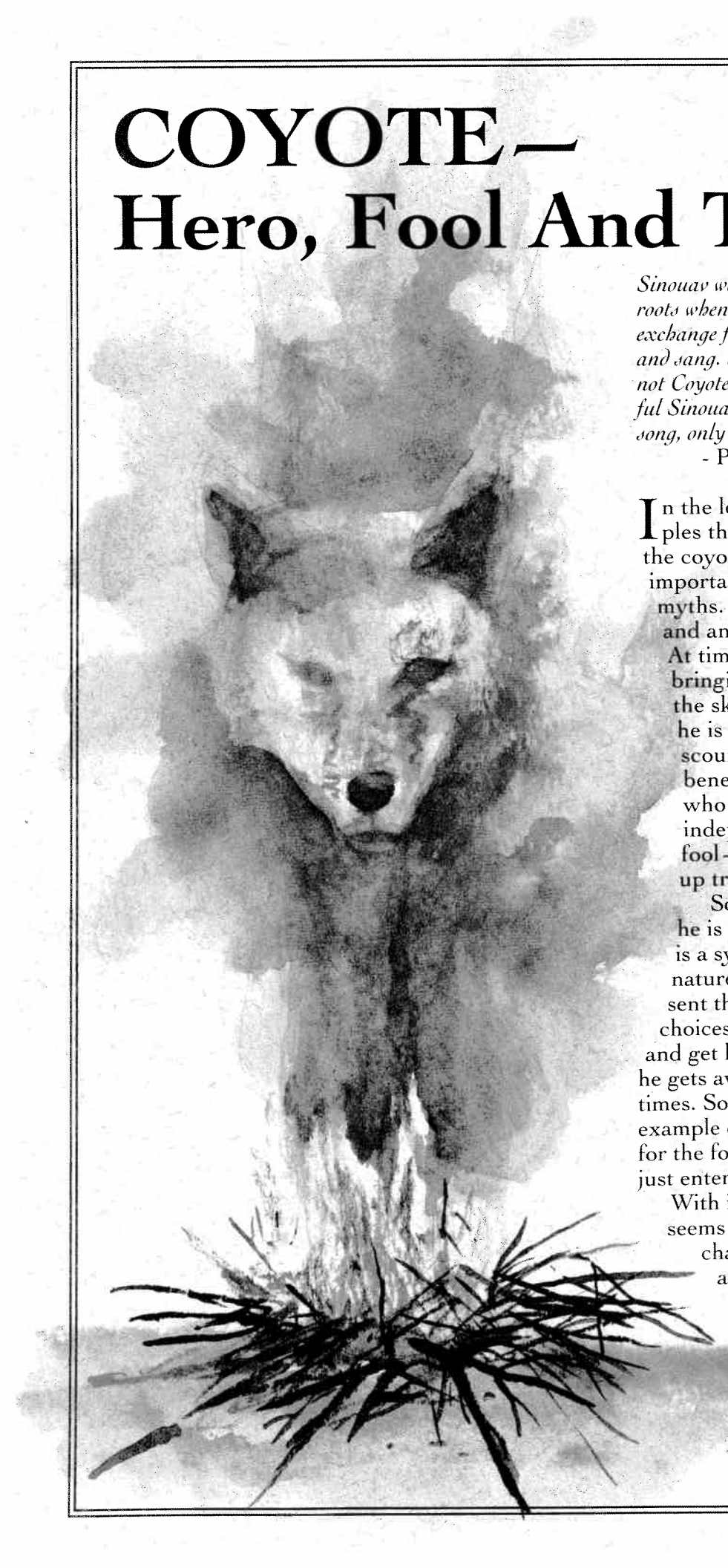
1995 WINTER COMPENDIUM OF WILDLIFE APPRECIATION

Colorado's Wildlife Company



WHO IS COYOTE

COYOTE— Hero, Fool And Trickster



Sinouav was unhappy. He had no song. One day he was digging roots when Coyote happened past. Sinouav offered him food in exchange for a wonderful coyote song. That night Sinouav sang and sang. Soon all his people said he sang the song of Sinouav, not Coyote. That night Coyote crept into camp, found the proudful Sinouav and took back his song. Even now, Sinouav has no song, only a lonely howl.

- Paiute myth. Sinouav is the Paiute word for wolf

In the legends and folklore of Native American peoples throughout the West, from Canada to Mexico, the coyote is more than just an animal. Coyote is an important culture figure, playing a role in countless myths. He is a special being, a spirit, both human and animal at the same time. Coyote has three faces. At times he is the hero, helping create humans, bringing them food, putting the sun and moon in the sky and performing magical deeds. Sometimes he is the trickster, a mischief-maker and a scoundrel trying to manipulate situations to his benefit. Coyote the trickster is an imp and a rebel who the listener admires for his cleverness and independence. Coyote's third persona is that of the fool—silly, arrogant, vain, the trickster who ends up tricked, thereby teaching a moral lesson.

Sometimes Coyote appears in human form, yet he is always Coyote, and recognized as such. Coyote is a symbol, reflecting the many sides of human nature. He is good and bad together; his antics present the many ways of dealing with life. Some of his choices are wise and self-sacrificing; some are foolish and get him in trouble; some are down right mean, and he gets away with it, because that's the way life is sometimes. So Coyote is at times a role model, at others an example of what not to do. And often he is a metaphor for the fortunes of life. And sometimes Coyote legends just entertain.

With its intelligence and adaptable nature, the coyote seems a natural choice as the model for the complex character, Coyote. Native Americans knew this animal well. They had seen its cleverness, its ability to solve problems, its readiness to steal food or to seemingly play tricks on people and other animals. They had laughed at, and been the victim of, its antics. The coyote taught lessons, showed how to live and revealed some of life's truths. And so the coyote became Coyote.

STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN

Whether it is the howling of coyotes, the bugling of elk, or the melodious song of a meadowlark, sound is a rich part of the wildlife watching experience. We use the term "watching" a bit loosely. The full enjoyment of watching wildlife comes with the pleasure of listening, too. If there were no sounds, no bird calls or frog songs or crickets, something would be missing from the enjoyment of wild things.

But sound is a part of nature which we often overlook, or take for granted. What would the autumn flight of geese be without their oh-so-familiar honking? Imagine witnessing a passing flight of sandhill cranes without hearing their accompanying, eerie calls? And would the West be the West without the howling of coyotes? The sounds of nature carry many associations, especially with the passing of the seasons—a robin's cheery song in spring, the goose music of fall—and with particular places—red-winged blackbirds calling in a wetland, frogs singing at the pond's edge. For many of us, sound carries associations from our childhood; we often make emotional associations with nature sounds—cheery warbling, quarrelsome quacking.

In the modern world we are bombarded by a cacophony of noise—traffic, airplanes, television, talking—and have precious little quiet time. We have learned to filter out urban racket, thus when we are outdoors, we also filter natural sounds.

But sounds are often the first and easiest evidence of wildlife we are likely to come across. Sounds are accessible and enjoyable. And often sound might be the only thing experienced—"Well, we heard them, but we never saw them." The very fact of our human presence in a natural setting usually causes animals to remain hidden. But we often still hear them—rustling in the underbrush, foraging for food, calling or singing.

Listening gets us to slow down, to look and listen, to pay attention to what's around us. Listening contributes to quietude, and to the experience of wildness. Once we are sitting quietly, not being intrusive, we heighten our chances of seeing wildlife as they re-emerge.

So when you go out to watch wildlife, remember also to stop, look and listen!

A Member Of The Family

It's pretty obvious that coyotes are members of the dog family, *Canidae*. They share dog-like characteristics—long muzzles with sensitive noses, sharp canine teeth, padded paws with four toes (and a dewclaw on the front feet), pointed ears, fur coat and bushy tail. In fact, coyotes, dogs and wolves all belong to the same genus—*Canis*. Genus is the closest relationship above the species level. The coyote, *Canis latrans*, the gray wolf, *Canis lupus* and red wolf, *Canis niger*, and the domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*, are related closely enough that they can interbreed. There is a good deal of anecdotal evidence concerning coyote-dog and coyote-wolf (primarily red wolf) hybrids. Rather than evolving from each other, it is likely these modern species evolved from common ancestors.

Foxes are more distant cousins of coyotes. Of our Colorado foxes—red, gray, kit and swift—all but one belong to the genus *Vulpes*. The gray fox alone belongs to the genus *Urocyon*. The fossil record indicates that North America, particularly its open prairies, was the setting for the evolution and dispersal of the canid family. The oldest records found, those of *Vulpes*, date from the Miocene Period (more than 5 million years ago); Genus *Canis* appeared in the Pliocene Period (2-5 million years ago); and *Urocyon*, a virtual late-bloomer, in the Pleistocene Period (10,000 to 2 million years ago). Modern man, *Homo sapiens*, entered the picture perhaps 100,000 to 250,000 years ago.

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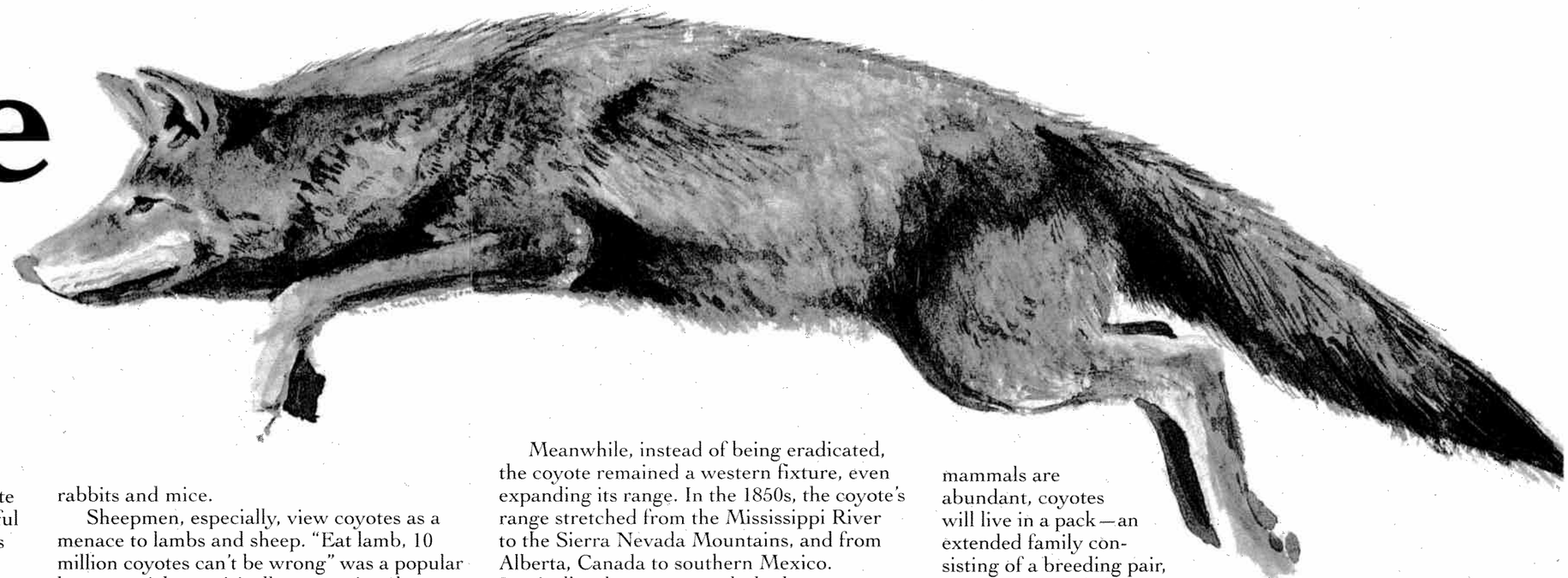
The Coyote

Colored In Shades Of Gray



The mournful, yipping howl of a coyote drifts across the full moon. A powerful image, but what association does this conjure in the mind of the listener? Evil killer? Persecuted animal? Western icon? Entertaining wildlife?

To the farmer or rancher, the coyote is often an enemy, a predator which kills livestock and threatens the stockman's livelihood. To the city-dweller, the song dog is a romantic icon of the American West, though some would be afraid of a coyote they encountered face to face. The naturalist and nature-lover sees the coyote as a valuable component of the western landscape, a remnant of wildness, adding much to the aesthetics of the outdoors experience. Many people are thrilled by seeing coyotes, and especially by hearing them.

So who is the real coyote? People often see the coyote as black or white, but the animal's true color is a shade of gray. Perhaps no other animal has generated as much emotion and controversy. But a coyote is neither cruel nor cuddly. It is a predator that kills to survive and there is no doubt some coyotes choose domestic animals as their prey. The coyote is also a fascinating, intelligent beast, particularly interesting because of its resemblance to our animal companion, the dog.

A coyote is neither right

rabbits and mice.

Sheepmen, especially, view coyotes as a menace to lambs and sheep. "Eat lamb, 10 million coyotes can't be wrong" was a popular bumper sticker satirically promoting the sheep raiser's point of view. Under a federally-funded predator eradication program begun in the 1930s—Animal Damage Control (ADC)—coyotes were shot, trapped, snared, poisoned, gassed and dug up by the millions. Use of poisoned baits, especially poisoned carcasses, killed countless non-target animals—hawks, eagles, badgers, owls, raccoons, dogs—either directly or by passing through the food chain.

But by the 1960s, public attitudes towards wildlife and predators were changing. Images of trapped animals slowly starving or strangling, or chewing off their paws to escape traps, aroused public sentiment against predator control. "Coyote-getters" which sprayed cyanide into a coyote's mouth when it tugged a baited trigger, and the use of the highly toxic Compound 1080 which caused a very painful, convulsive death, received lots of bad publicity.

Evidence of this changing public view began with the Leopold Committee, appointed in 1963 to evaluate the federal predator control program. The Committee's report stated that all wildlife had value and a place in nature and that large predators "are objects of fascination to most Americans, and for

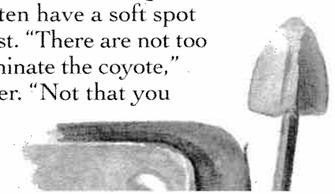
Meanwhile, instead of being eradicated, the coyote remained a western fixture, even expanding its range. In the 1850s, the coyote's range stretched from the Mississippi River to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and from Alberta, Canada to southern Mexico. Ironically, changes wrought by humans encouraged the expansion of the coyote's range. First, wolves, lions and grizzly bears were largely destroyed; these larger predators had kept coyotes within a certain range and out of forested areas. Second, overgrazing of prairies and rangelands allowed the establishment of invasive, weedy plants. Though unpalatable to livestock, they provided food and cover for rodents and rabbits, the coyote's main foods. Once found only on the prairie, today coyotes range from the Arctic to the tropics—they have been spotted near Point Barrow, Alaska and in Costa Rica.

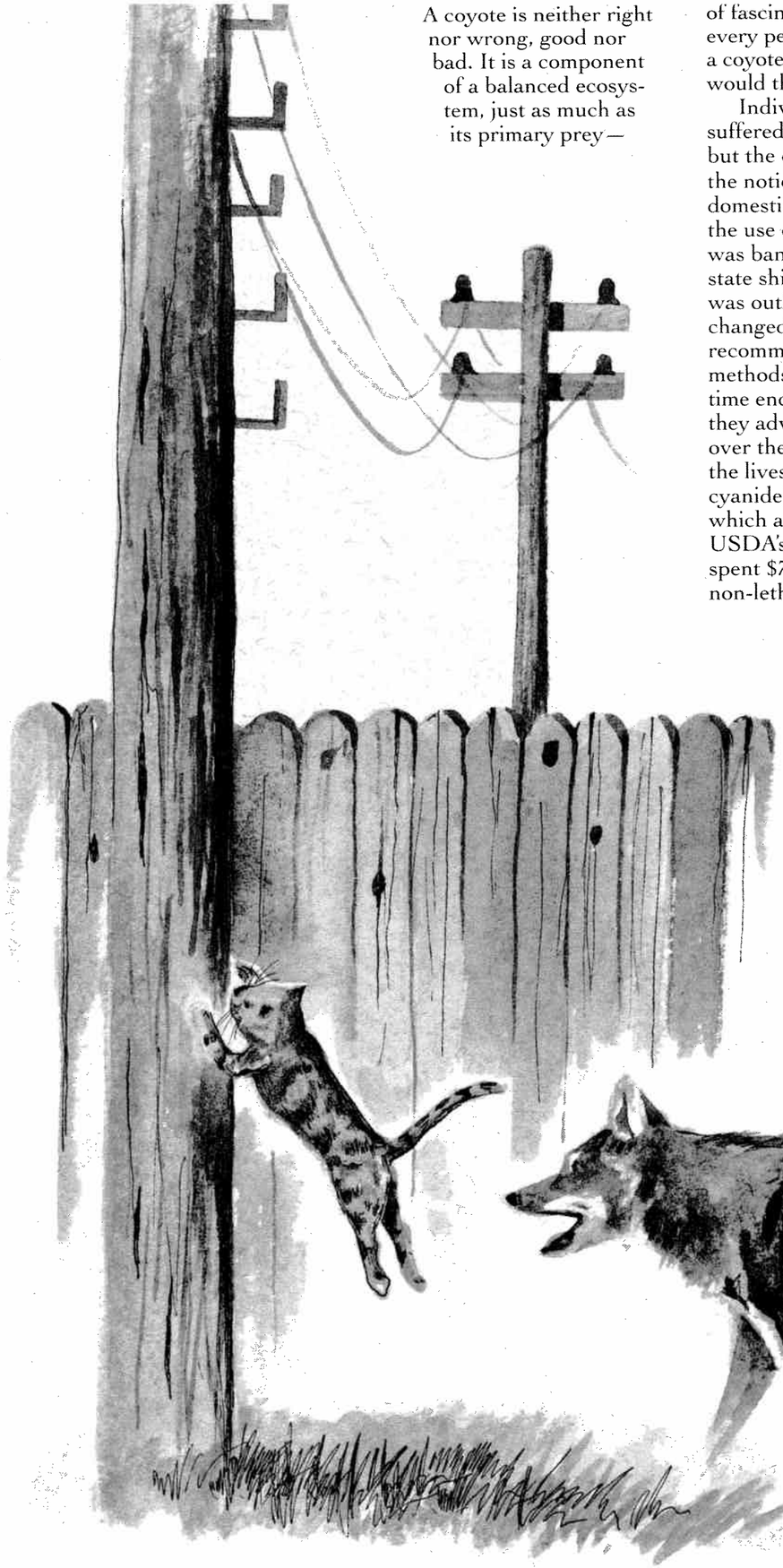
The coyote's ability to survive is legendary. When coyote populations are low, due to trapping or other pressures, females produce larger litters. Coyotes adapt well to life around humans, eating roadkill, sometimes taking livestock and poultry, denning under abandoned structures, even following behind farm machinery to catch rodents as they are flushed from hiding. Stomach contents studies show that 90% of a coyote's food is animal material, with up to 75% of that being one species—jackrabbits. But when times are hard, coyotes will eat anything available, from watermelon and

mammals are abundant, coyotes will live in a pack—an extended family consisting of a breeding pair, their pups and their young from previous years. The pack will greet each other, share "babysitting" chores, feed the young and hunt cooperatively. "Discipline among the pups and obedience to signals is more strictly enforced in coyote than in some human families," writes researcher Gier.

Communication among coyotes is the stuff of legends. Coyotes have one of the most complex communication systems of any North American mammal. They use body posture, vocalizations and facial expression. Howling may reaffirm bonds between the pack and declare territory, as well as communicate position and hunting success to other coyotes. Or sometimes it may just announce the emotional state of the singer.

Controversy over coyotes continues, as stock raisers lobby for renewed control efforts and environmentalists hold the line on protection of predators. Yet even those who regard the coyote as an enemy often have a soft spot for the song dog of the West. "There are not too many of us who would eliminate the coyote," said a New Mexico rancher. "Not that you could. You hate them, yet it's a thrill to hear them





of fascination to most Americans, and for every person whose sheep may be molested by a coyote there are perhaps 1000 others who would thrill to hear a coyote chorus at night."

Individual stock raisers unquestionably suffered significant losses to coyote predation, but the empirical evidence did not support the notion of widespread predation on domestic livestock by all coyotes. In 1972 the use of poisons for the control of predators was banned on federal lands; later the interstate shipment of 1080 and other poisons was outlawed. Responding to the public's changed view of predators, ADC now first recommends non-lethal predator control methods like fencing, guard dogs and nighttime enclosures. If lethal control is warranted, they advocate direct controls such as trapping over the use of toxicants, or methods like the livestock protection collar (containing cyanide) that target the specific animals which are killing livestock. In 1994, the USDA's Denver Wildlife Research Center spent $7 million of a $9 million budget on non-lethal predator control research.

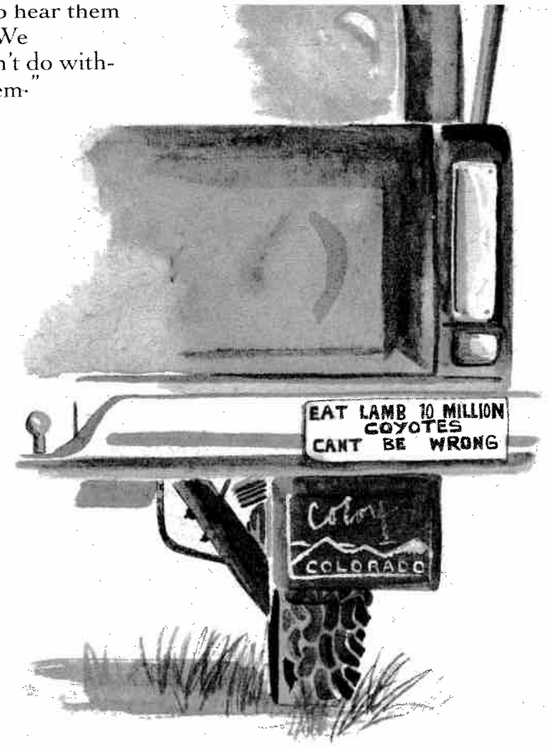
A coyote is neither right nor wrong, good nor bad. It is a component of a balanced ecosystem, just as much as its primary prey—rabbits and mice.

anything available, from watermelon and berries to bugs and carrion.

Intelligent and adaptable, they learn to avoid traps and poisoned baits; a coyote which escapes a trap is rarely trapped again. Humans unwittingly helped make the coyote the "super animal" it is today. The slow, weak, unwary or dim-witted were trapped, shot, chased down, poisoned or hit by cars. These pressures would either destroy a species, or select for characteristics like cleverness, wariness, heightened senses and speed. "We, with our persecution of the coyote, have added another parameter to natural selection, with the result that coyotes are now larger, smarter, more adaptable, faster and more cunning than when white men first entered coyote's territory," wrote Kansas State University coyote researcher H.T. Gier.

Though always thought of as loners, coyote social structure depends on available resources. A mated pair and their young are the basic social unit. The family breaks up in late fall; the young live on their own, or sometimes in twos, until they find a mate. Where large

thrill to hear them howl. We wouldn't do without them."



COLORADO WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE

The following are suggestions for sites to watch and hear coyotes from the *Colorado Wildlife Viewing Guide*, available for $8.95 from the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation, 6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216; 303-291-7212

Site 20 Trough Road

DESCRIPTION: Twenty-eight mile drive from Kremmling to State Bridge along Colorado River with excellent scenic views of the Gore Range, Williams Fork Mountains, and the dramatic white waters of the Colorado. Route traverses diverse habitat, climbing open sagebrush hillsides before descending through mixed conifer woodlands, with aspen on higher parts of the road. Cottonwood groves on the valley floor. Dirt road suitable for passenger cars in dry weather.

Site 44 Rocky Mountain Arsenal

DESCRIPTION: A small portion of the 17,000 acres of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal were set aside for chemical and weapons production carried on here for forty years. Production areas were surrounded by a one mile buffer which created an "island of habitat" for wildlife as the Denver metro area grew. Today an amazing diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians inhabit this pocket of undeveloped land on the edge of a major metropolitan area. Ponds and lakes, grasslands, riparian zones. Arsenal access currently restricted to guided tours. Call (303) 289-0232 for information.

Site 51 Pawnee Buttes

DESCRIPTION: The Pawnee National Grassland is a remnant of the plains grassland that once covered eastern Colorado. Federal lands are intermingled with private ownership. Some blocks are grazed and cultivated. Dramatic high point is the Pawnee Buttes, a pair of sandstone formations towering 250 feet above the surrounding prairie. The Grassland is divided into two parcels. The buttes are in the eastern parcel and the campground is in the western parcel.

DOW WORKING FOR WILDLIFE

The Furbearer Management Plan

The 1992 passage of Amendment 10, which outlawed spring bear hunting and the use of bait or dogs for hunting bears, demonstrated the need to re-evaluate public attitudes towards wildlife and wildlife management. One of the first issues to surface was the trapping of furbearing mammals. Under Colorado statute, coyotes are classified as furbearers—animals whose pelts have commercial value.

To gauge public attitudes toward trapping, DOW commissioned a survey through Colorado State University. The survey found 61% of Coloradans would vote to ban trapping, though most would support its selective use as a means to protect livestock or public safety and health. Less than 15% approved of it as recreation or for commercial fur trapping. The survey also found little difference in attitudes between urban dwellers and those residing in rapidly developing, formerly rural areas such as Montrose. Also surprising, says DOW biologist Bruce Gill, was that rural Coloradans were almost evenly split over the issue, instead of being largely in favor of it, as was expected.

Based upon these survey results, plus input from as many interested groups as possible (from the Colorado Trappers Association to Animal Rights Mobilization) DOW formulated a furbearer management policy. New hunting and trapping regulations, some of which take effect this year, take into account changing public perceptions of the uses and value of wildlife. They are intended to reduce pain and injury to trapped animals and allow the safe release of non-target animals, while retaining trapping as a tool to reduce damage to land and property and control certain animals for safety and health reasons. Trapping strictly for the sale of furs or for recreation has been eliminated. Seasons were left open only on eight species which have historically damaged property, agriculture or human health and safety—coyotes, badgers, red foxes, raccoons, striped skunks, muskrats, bobcats and beavers. Analysis of trapping records showed that these eight species already comprised 90% of the animals being trapped, and 92% of the total value of all furs harvested. "This showed we already had trapping focused on animal damage management, where it should be," says Gill.

Regulations on coyotes were changed from an open season to November 1 through February 28, though coyotes that damage private property may be taken year-round without a license by landowners. Seasons were closed on gray fox, swift fox, pine marten, mink, opossum, ringtail, hog-nosed skunks, spotted skunks and weasels, and limited seasons were instituted for badgers, red foxes, raccoons, striped skunks, muskrats, bobcats and beavers.

Other new regulations require that each trap must be checked daily to reduce the suffering of a trapped animal. Steel-jawed leghold traps (except those used in water) are banned as of 1997. Traps must have padded jaws. Snares must be fitted with a stop which prevents the strangulation of the animal.

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