

Coyote Damage in Orchards

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Coyotes may be a nuisance in orchards, particularly due to their disruption of irrigation lines. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*, latin for 'barking dog') have been able to increase their range concurrent with human encroachment. Their ease of adaptation to habitat changes is attributed to their ability to alter diet, social dynamics, and breeding habits. Additionally, the reduction of the gray wolf population, a natural predator of the coyote, has resulted in the expansion of coyotes across North America. The breeding season generally commences in January, and pups are born after around a 2-month gestation period, with litters consisting of 3-9 pups. Approximately 6-10 weeks after birth, pups will emerge from the den to embark on their first hunting excursions. Consequently, by mid-April, growers may start to notice increased coyote activity in orchards, and the frustration of coyote damage to drip lines may coincide with the first spring irrigation events.

Management

Because coyotes cover territories 10-12 miles from their den, destruction of known den sites may alleviate, but not eradicate, a coyote problem. Though some growers provide buckets of drinking water to dissuade coyotes from damaging irrigation lines, the overall success of this technique may be limited. Mature coyotes and pups may be intrigued by the sound of water running through irrigation lines, and damage the lines in play rather than in thirst. Due to the adverse affect of coyotes on agriculture, coyote management programs in California began in 1891. Coyotes are now classified as "non-game" animals in California and may be taken throughout the year with an appropriate hunting license. For more information on regulations pertaining to coyote control, visit the California Department of Fish and Game website (www.dfg.ca.gov), and proceed to the link for non-game animals. In response to complaints of coyote damage, several counties (including Fresno and Kings Counties) have personnel to assist with assessment of coyote damage and humane removal of animals from coyote-impacted orchards. For more information on county-level support, call your local Ag Commissioner's office.