

Coyotes, Foxes Coexist, Share Island Territory

A number of times in the last months, I've been asked about the coyotes and foxes that reside on the Island. The coyotes are certainly not as visible as they were in the last years. In part, this is because some of the coyotes causing problems last year were culled by the State Park, and some left by crossing on the short-lived ice bridge that we had last winter. Whatever the reason, they're certainly not being seen as often in the daytime.

I've only seen one coyote this summer. I was riding along State Road in the early evening, when trotting down the road came a medium-sized coyote. He paused, and took off into the woods, which in itself was a reassuring behavior, in contrast with last year's coyotes, who liked to turn around (if heading the other way) and curiously come back toward you to investigate. It seemed that they were not very leery of people. They also don't seem to be out on the



Nature Notes

By Patricia Martin

prowl as frequently during the day as they have been in the last few years.

I've had several people mention that they've seen coyotes or foxes in the evening or early morning, but a more unusual sighting happened recently. A couple of friends of mine were out horseback riding early, to help set up the Hunter Pace. Not too far from Sugar Loaf, they spied both a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and a coyote (*Canis latrans*) together.

In an unusual standoff, the red fox appeared to be trying to drive the coyote away. Now, you have to understand that the red fox stands only about a foot high and weighs about 7.5 to 15.4 pounds, compared to the coyote, who is the size of a small German shepherd and weighs 24 to 46 pounds. You would think that the fox, when faced with a coyote, would simply try to get away. But in this case, the fox stood his (or her) ground. The

coyote, which appeared not to be full grown, eventually took off and left the fox alone. The only thing that we can figure out is that the red fox was protecting its den and young. This area east of Fort Holmes is a common one in which to see red fox. I know a couple of dens that have been used by foxes over the years, and in fact, one spring I saw three kits poking their heads out of their den, near the location in which the coyote and fox were spotted.

It is certainly within the realm of possibility that the fox was protecting young. The young are born in the spring, about 50 days after copulation, which occurs in early January through mid-March. The young stay with their parents until late September. By the time the kits are five weeks old, they venture out of the den, and by the time they're two months old, they're eating meat. The male red fox is a good father, bringing back food

like birds and mice for the young to feed on. He also watches over the young as they venture out of the den, and takes them on their first hunting trips.

One time when I was walking with my dog along Fern Way (the old North Bike Trail), a red fox shot out of the woods, and Jake (my dog) took off after it. Every time Jake lost the trail, the fox would give a high-pitched yelp and Jake would again give chase. It seemed that the fox was leading the dog away from its den. It could have lost my dog at any point, but didn't.

Red foxes are usually solitary hunters, though they may hunt with a mate. They range up to five miles on an evening's outing, and occupy a home range of about 250 to 1,200 acres (Mackinac in total is 2,221 acres). They hunt for a variety of things, from mice to squirrels, to rabbits, to ground-nesting birds. They're somewhat opportunistic, feeding on carrion and occasionally on snakes, crayfish, salamanders, crickets, and beetles.

During the spring and fall, they also consume small amounts of nuts and fruits. It is the sense of smell and acute hearing that helps the red fox locate its prey. Once located, it slowly stalks its victim. When it's close enough, the fox pounces, grabbing the prey with its paws and killing it with a quick bite behind its head.

When the young disperse in the fall, the young males leave,

first traveling on average 18 miles away from their parents. The females stay closer to home. The thing that I want to know is, where do they go on Mackinac Island, in that the furthest they can go in any one direction is about three miles?

It is interesting to note that foxes and coyotes seem to have overlapping territories on the Island, as their home range is four to 15 square miles.

I've always understood that these two species don't usually tolerate each other in their home territory, so it's interesting that they seem to coexist on the Island, at least to some extent. This may be because of the abundance of small game for them to eat, birds, rabbits, squirrels, or mice, so they may not find themselves in direct competition for food.

I found the incident of the fox and the coyote very curious, in that it's not uncommon for coyotes to kill foxes, as the long-legged coyote can certainly outrun its smaller cousins, and is able to travel up to 35 miles per hour for short distances. The red fox was probably lucky that it ran into a younger coyote, and one that probably wasn't particularly hungry. Otherwise, the situation could have turned out differently.

Trish Martin is a year-around resident of Mackinac Island, has earned a master's degree in botany from Central Michigan University, and owns Bogan Lane Inn.

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NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE ON MACKINAC ISLAND

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out. Jamie Bynoe played for the fire department and got a two base hit in the 7th inning, which helped them with their victory. The true spirit of the Island could be felt throughout the evening.

Jennifer and Lucas Karhoff enjoyed a wonderful vacation at their cottage on Bourisaw Lane, leaving Thursday for their home in Findlay, Ohio.

The John Shuflets visited their Mission Point Resort this past week.

Father Don Libby, of Empire,

near Traverse City, was a guest at his family party at Bogan Lane Inn.

Dr. and Mrs. Nicholas Lentini of Cheboygan were guests of their daughter, Val and Phil Porter and family, at their home at Fort Mackinac.

Mickey and Smi Horn entertained their daughter, Melinda Porter and family, at a dinner at The Gate House Wednesday, August 15. They were celebrating Melinda's birthday. Melinda's sister, Patricia (Squeak) of St. Ignace, joined the family celebration.

Have a good week!

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