



Coyotes expand their range into south Florida ¹

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General Comments

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) have been expanding their range throughout the United States, and have recently spread throughout Florida, most recently into south Florida. Of Florida's 67 counties, the presence of coyotes have been documented in all but the two most southern counties, Dade and Monroe. A dead coyote was found in the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve in southern Collier County, which represents the farthest south that coyotes have been documented in Florida to date (M. Owens, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1998; Figure 1).

Coyotes have spread throughout the United States and during the last 30-40 years have also increased in Florida and are believed to have entered the state from Alabama and Georgia during the 1960's. Coyotes were found living in the northwest part of the state by the 1970's. Although it has been reported that a small number of coyotes were deliberately introduced into Florida by hunters during the mid-1900s, it is not clear whether this release played an important role in the establishment of coyote populations in the state. Regardless, the more important factor likely seems to be the natural range expansion of coyotes across the United States

following extirpation of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) and agricultural development. Assuming the coyote expansion began in the 1960's, it has taken 30 years for coyotes to spread throughout the state.

One of the first studies to determine coyote distribution in Florida was done by employees of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). A mail survey was used to document sightings of coyotes. Eighteen counties, mostly in the Panhandle, reported coyote sightings (Figure 1). A follow-up survey was conducted in 1990 and coyotes were reported in 31 additional counties (Figure 1). A survey for coyote tracks conducted in four southern Florida counties was published in 1996 and revealed that coyotes had become well established in southern Florida by the mid-1990s (Figure 1).

In 1997, an organized, annual survey for coyote tracks was initiated in Florida, with a focus on central and south Florida. The survey utilizes prepared "track stations" baited with scent baits used to attract coyotes and other predators. The tracks of animals that walk through the track station are recorded and data from the survey is compiled and analyzed by the University of Florida. Each year an annual report summarizing the information is

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prepared and made available on the South Florida Coyote Study web site ([HYPERLINK "http://www.imok.ufl.edu/wild/coyote/index.htm"](http://www.imok.ufl.edu/wild/coyote/index.htm) <http://www.imok.ufl.edu/wild/coyote/index.htm>). To date, the survey includes over 40 locations and 700 track stations, mostly in south and central Florida. The annual track survey is an effort to document trends in coyote numbers, which provides a way to monitor expansion of the range and abundance of coyotes in Florida.

Additional evidence of coyotes in Florida was provided by coyote carcasses collected during a University of Florida study of coyote diseases and parasites during 1997-1998. Ranchers, University of Florida Cooperative Extension Agents, and other individuals helped collect coyotes. We also contacted biologists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and asked if they could confirm the presence of coyotes in counties from which there were no reports. FWC biologists confirmed the presence of coyotes in Baker, Duval, St. John's, Volusia, Pinellas, Glades, Manatee, Charlotte, Hardee, Martin, and Palm Beach counties. M. Main confirmed coyotes in Lee county during 1998.

The information provided from all these sources was used to make a new coyote distribution map for Florida, which illustrates the range expansion of coyotes throughout Florida during the last 30-40 years (Figure 1.).

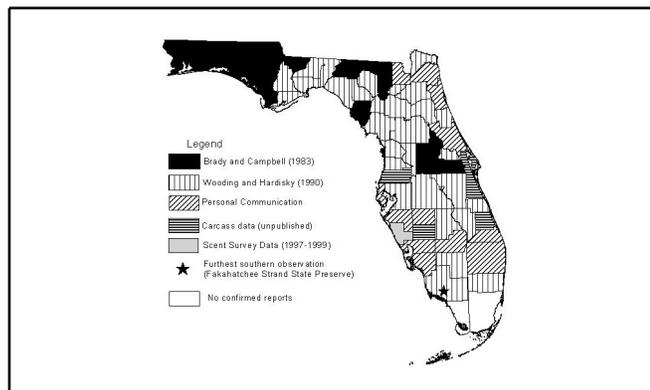


Figure 1. Distribution of coyotes in Florida based on published surveys, reports, and unpublished data, including personal communication (see text for description of sources).

Additional Information

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