

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

Coyote

by John Serrao

Although the coyote has long been associated with the prairies and deserts of the western states, it is now established throughout our country. Since first entering Florida in the 1970s, this highly adaptable and intelligent canid has successfully taken up residence in every one of our state's counties. It is thought that the eastward spread of the coyote became possible when its 2 major competitors (and predators), the wolf and the mountain lion (or panther) were extirpated from the east.

Florida's coyotes range in color from gray to rusty brown (see my recent photo from upstate

NY) and even black, and usually weigh between 30 and 40 pounds. The narrow muzzle, pointed ears, and bushy tail that is extended straight out behind it as it runs are all hallmarks of the coyote. Pastures, cattle ranges, prairies, agricultural areas and other open habitats are preferred, but coyotes also thrive in forests, scrub lands, residential areas and even urban areas. Predominantly a hunter of small mammals such as mice, rats, and rabbits, the coyote also eats birds, frogs, reptiles, acorns, fruits, insects, carrion and human garbage.

Coyotes have been known to attack and prey upon stray cats and small dogs, which makes it important for pet owners to keep their animals indoors or in well-fenced enclosures, and always on a leash when being walked. Never leave pet food outdoors overnight, and — very importantly — never feed any of our wild mammals since this practice often results in a loss of their natural fear of humans and a gradual development of associating people with

a source of food.