

AVERSION CONDITIONING AND HUMANE HAZING

Aversion Conditioning is a suite of tools and techniques used to reshape behavior through negative, or aversive, stimulus. When working with coyotes, aversion conditioning is used to establish and maintain healthy boundaries between humans and coyotes.

Coyotes are naturally fearful of humans and they will try to avoid interaction. However, they can learn to tolerate humans when nothing “bad” happens in their presence. Coyotes can increase their proximity tolerance for humans when they find food ‘rewards’ in an urban setting or when they receive food directly from a person. Aversion conditioning is used to reverse this learned behavior and re-sensitize coyotes to people and urban spaces.

Humane hazing is a form of aversion conditioning used to compel coyotes to move away and keep a respectful and safe distance from humans.

In addition to aversion conditioning, there must be a concerted effort to locate and eliminate any food resources that might have attracted the coyote(s) in the first place.

Humane Hazing Principles

- Municipalities should not solely rely on their citizens to reshape coyote behavior, but maintain a team of trained responders to implement hazing, when necessary.
- While community members should know how to implement basic hazing techniques, strategic or high-intensity hazing should be conducted by experts or qualified personnel.
- When hazing a coyote, a person’s clear delivery of confidence and assertiveness is more important than props or sophisticated tools.
- A coyote may be less responsive to hazing in close proximity to a den site or pups, a food resource, or when a domestic dog is present.
- Hazing is not appropriate near a natal den or established rendezvous site where there are young pups present, where a coyote is guarding a prey item, or toward a sick or otherwise debilitated coyote.
- A coyote’s lack of response to aversion conditioning should not be immediately considered problematic but cause for expert evaluation to discover the underlying reason for the animal’s behavior.

- Retreating from a coyote or failure to follow through with hazing can lead to the coyote being more complacent or at ease.
- Aversion conditioning must be used strategically, with the appropriate level of intensity suitable for the individual animal and unique set of circumstances.
- In order to be effective, the person hazing must be clearly visible by the coyote so it associates the aversive stimulus with a person.
- Hazing is meant to be used only on coyotes exhibiting problematic behavior or in locations a community has deemed unacceptable.
- When hazing groups of adolescents, try to identify and focus on the adult. Once that animal “turns shoulder” the rest will follow, thus teaching the younger animals to also keep a respectful distance from humans.

Humane Hazing Basics

- ! Always put human safety first!
- ! Never run from a coyote.
- ! Never corner a coyote; always allow it a safe escape route.
- ! Be aware of traffic and other hazardous conditions.
- ! Be sure companion dogs are desensitized to hazing and props in advance.

Basic Humane Hazing Techniques

- If accompanied by a dog, be sure the dog is on a leash no longer than 6’ and at your side. Pick up small dogs. Create distance between you and the coyote(s) as you leave the area. Keep watch behind you. Report the encounter to officials/professionals. Scare the coyote away if it comes critically close to you or your dog.
- Stand tall and make yourself look big. Make and maintain eye contact. Most importantly, advance toward the coyote until it retreats. If it stops and stares back, keep advancing.* Ideally, you want it to move out of sight.
- If you need to make yourself appear even bigger, use props, like waving a “scare stick” (stick with mylar ribbon at the tip), an article of clothing, an umbrella, or snapping open a large garbage bag as you advance.
- Make some noise. You can clap your hands, shout, ‘bark’. Mean business!

- If you need to be louder, use a noisemaker as you advance on the coyote, like an air horn or rescue whistle, a 'penny' can (a soda can filled with coins), a party horn.
- If you feel the need to extend your reach, throw a projectile toward (not at) the animal as you advance, like sticks, a clump of dirt, small rocks, a tennis ball. In warm weather, you can use a garden hose, or water balloons.

** If a coyote is reluctant to move away, consider the time of year and if pups might be present, or if there might be a prey item nearby that it is guarding. Give it space and report the incident to officials/professionals so they can investigate the underlying cause of the coyote's behavior.*

Recommended Reading

For more information on aversion conditioning we recommend reading *Advancing Best Practices for Aversion Conditioning (Humane Hazing) to Mitigate Human-Coyote Conflicts in Urban Areas*, by Lesley Sampson, *Coyote Watch Canada* and Lauren Van Patter, *Queen's University, Kingston, Canada*, which influenced the above material. Link to the published paper: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1625&context=hwi>

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