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COYOTE, WILD DOG OF THE DESERT

We had started out across the high desert early in the morning. The road had led on to nowhere, until suddenly it turned down a dry wash hemmed in with rimrocks. Rounding a point, we startled a coyote hunting for jack-rabbits. He leaped the rock wall and bounded away up the slope, dodging in and out among the sagebushes as if he expected to hear the spat of a bullet. Nothing happened, so he stopped near the top of the rise, curious to see who had invaded his hunting ground.

That evening as we sat around the camp-fire, we heard the song of the coyote. It is a series of short barks, increasing in power and pitch until it ends in a long wail. Almost immediately another joined in the chorus from somewhere in the dark. One might have thought there were several coyotes.

The coyote or prairie wolf is just a keen wild dog that wanders around and lives a sort of a vagabond life. He has no friends. He depends upon his wits to outstrip others- and man. With an eternal bounty upon his head, he is a happy-go-lucky rover living along the border land of civilization.

From southern Mexico to northern Alberta, Canada, and from Michigan to the Pacific Coast, the coyote may be found pursuing his crafty ways. He is smaller than a gray wolf and less savage. His fox-like nose and ears seem to be a sign of his cunning. When the coyote was first discovered he was given the scientific name, *Latrans* (the barker), because he is the only one of the tribe that barks habitually. His voice is a remarkable gift, like the epic songs of the cowboys.

An average male coyote is about four feet in length, stands a little under two feet at the shoulders and weighs around thirty pounds. The females are a little less all around. Coyotes mate in February and

the pups, usually eight to ten, are born in April. As many as fourteen may be found in one litter. The den is either a hole excavated by the old coyotes or the abandoned dugout of some other animal. The little fellows are born with eyes shut, and they open on the eighth or ninth day after birth. When they are about six weeks old, the parents bring in rabbits and other solid food. They wrangle and fight over this in the den and around the door, and finally in the fall go out into the world to hunt their own.

The coyote is a dog, and as such eats every kind of flesh, fish or fowl that he can master, dead or alive. He is accused of attacking large birds like turkeys, and even sheep when hungry. He is a scavenger and picks up offal at every chance. In the western states, the numerous jack-rabbits make up his average diet, and both are the common pest of the farmer. When hunting jacks, a pair of coyotes will work together, using their cunning against the dumb bunny. But when after antelope or deer, they go in packs spreading out into a wide circle and harrying the quarry until they exhaust him.

The coyote is perhaps the one wild animal of the western country too keen to be exterminated by the modern methods of man. No other wild creature has withstood the continued warfare of expert hunters and the steady campaign of guns, strychnine, and steel traps.

He is an adept at avoiding destruction, but desperate hunger sometimes weakens him into partaking of poisoned bait. He seems to sense when a man is unarmed and will sit undisturbed within gunshot. He considers an automobile a harmless object of curiosity, and this is where he misjudges sometimes.

For the past twenty years there have been three or four thousand coyotes killed usually by the federal hunters in Oregon, and

this is not counting those that are trapped and killed by fur hunters and many others who take a shot at one of these wild dogs when opportunity presents. The coyote knows that he is always on the firing line. Experience with man has taught him all the tricks of the trade. His sharp wits, developed by this experience, hold a scanty but steady balance in coyoteland.