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Coyotes in park prompt warning

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ANDERSON TWP. - The recent sighting of two coyotes in the fenced-in dog field at Kellogg Park in Anderson Township has prompted park officials to post a warning about wild animals.

Coyote roam in parks throughout the region and have been seen frequently in residential areas, but it's unusual to find them in public fenced-in areas such as dog parks.

An Anderson Township Park District maintenance man spotted the coyotes one morning about two weeks ago, said Ken Kushner, park district executive director. "At first, he thought they were two dogs," he said. "But then it dawned on him that they didn't look like dogs."

Kushner speculated that the coyotes were chasing a squirrel and dug under the fence surrounding the park. Some time after the maintenance man saw them, they found their way out.

As a precaution, park officials have posted a sign at the Kellogg Avenue park's dog field entrance: "This area is home to many wild animals, including deer, raccoons, coyotes, etc. Please be aware of your surroundings at all times for the safety of yourself, other visitors and your dog(s)."

Kushner said there's no reason for people to be afraid to bring their pets to the park. "I've seen them for years, not in that specific area, but in all of our parks," he said. "You just have to be sensible about what you see."

Steve Payne said the coyote sighting won't keep him from bringing his three dogs to Kellogg Park. "I'm fairly familiar with coyotes," the Anderson Township resident said. "We travel to Colorado a lot and see them routinely out there. Unless you have small pets running loose, they're basically very harmless creatures and try to avoid contact with people."

Full-grown coyotes are 40 to 45 pounds, have pointed ears and long, bushy tails and often have a black ridge down the middle of their backs.

Wildlife experts say coyotes are afraid of people and roam outside wooded areas primarily at night.

They feed mostly on rodents and small mammals. In this region, there are occasional reports of coyote attacks - some fatal - on small dogs and cats.

"It's nice that the park district is telling people to pay attention to coyotes," Payne said. "But coyotes are not a concern to me. If I saw one, I'd just stay out of its way."