

NOTES

ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOUR BY A MULE DEER TO COYOTES IN VERNON, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Predation on mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) by coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in North America is well documented (e.g., Lingle and Wilson 2001, Pierce et al. 2000, Patterson and Messier 2003). The anti-predator behaviour of deer to coyotes, however, is far less reported (Bekoff 1978, Paquet and Brook 2004). This note describes an observation of an escape tactic used by a mule deer to avoid predation by two coyotes in the northern Okanagan Valley.

On 12 September 2004, while observing through a telescope the foraging of Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) along the shore of Rose's Pond in Vernon at 0830 hrs., I noticed that something else was moving in the background. It was a small mule deer wading from the centre of the pond, about 1.5 - 2.0 ha in size, toward a trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) copse on the west shore. Moving slowly together along the shore to meet the deer were two coyotes, one slightly larger than the other that I assumed to be a male (Cornelius 1994). The male stopped where the deer would reach shore. The other coyote, its mate, stopped just behind and they both awaited the arrival of the deer. The doe walked ashore slowly and cautiously. The male coyote waited until the deer was no more than one meter away and lunged, seizing the doe behind her right ear. The other coyote also lunged toward the deer but she turned and plunged back into the pond before contact could be made. After one to two seconds the male released her and waded back to shore where its mate waited. Although the bite appeared powerful I could not detect any blood on the deer's neck.

The deer swam toward the centre of the pond until she reached a shallow spot close to the end of a long peninsula of grassland. She started to walk towards the shore but the two coyotes had walked around the pond and were once again waiting for her

at the anticipated landing spot. The deer waded a few more meters toward the centre of the pond and stood watching the coyotes.

Meanwhile, from the long grasses behind the beach, two lanky coyote pups appeared. They played with a stick for a few seconds and watched the two adult coyotes that appeared to regard them as their pups. The pups went back and forth through the grasses and into the trembling aspen copse looking out frequently to check on the adults. The male coyote lay down where the grasses met the beach, covering its nose with its tail but always watching the deer in the water. The female coyote walked along the beach a little farther to the east. I watched the drama for another 15 minutes but nothing more happened. The male coyote rested while its mate sat. When the deer moved toward the shore, even one or two footsteps, the male coyote would ready itself to intercept her.

I left Rose's Pond to explore some wetlands a few kilometers away but returned two hours later to find the deer still standing in water up to her belly. The coyotes were not visible but the wariness of the deer suggested the coyote family was still nearby.

Literature Cited

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About the Author

Chris, a recently retired high school English teacher, is an active birder and regular contributor to natural history journals. He continues to participate in organized surveys and coordinates activities for the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in the northern Okanagan valley.