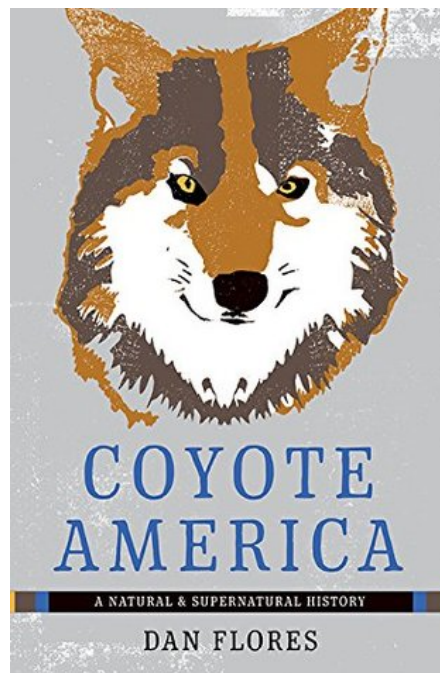




Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History

Dan Flores

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With its uncanny night howls, unrivaled ingenuity, and amazing resilience, the coyote is the stuff of legends. In Indian folktales it often appears as a deceptive trickster or a sly genius. But legends don't come close to capturing the incredible survival story of the coyote. As soon as Americans—especially white Americans—began ranching and herding in the West, they began working to destroy the coyote. Despite campaigns of annihilation employing poisons, gases, helicopters, and engineered epidemics, coyotes didn't just survive, they thrived, expanding across the continent from Anchorage, Alaska, to New York's Central Park. In the war between humans and coyotes, coyotes have won hands-down.

Coyote America is both an environmental and a deep natural history of the coyote. It traces both the five-million-year-long biological story of an animal that has become the “wolf” in our backyards, as well as its cultural evolution from a preeminent spot in Native American religions to the hapless foil of the Road Runner. A deeply American tale, the story of the coyote in the American West and beyond is a sort of Manifest Destiny in reverse, with a pioneering hero whose career holds up an uncanny mirror to the successes and failures of American expansionism.

An illuminating biography of this extraordinary animal, *Coyote America* isn't just the story of an animal's survival—it is one of the great epics of our time.

Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History Details

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From Reader Review Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History for online ebook

Chris says

A very insightful book or should I say biography of the coyote. If there is one animal that exemplifies American exceptionalism it's the coyote. They even have their own reverse American manifest destiny. Native Americans revered it but we Christian Europeans have proceeded to kill it in the most horrific ways. And it has defied us in all our attempts and science. It's a resilient survivor who is unfortunately still under attack. The concerted attempts to extinguish it have lead to its spreading all over the country. Indeed urban coyotes are better off than rural coyotes. Flores talks about the coyote myths, Walt Disney, Wile E. Coyote, and the science of coyotes. Coyotes are as polarizing as religion and politics. They have been ruthlessly persecuted as pests and varmints by ranchers. When science discovered that their predation on livestock was not true it didn't matter. We still needed someone to blame for the death of livestock and the coyote was that bogeyman. Coyotes are the Rodney Dangerfield of the canid world. They get no respect. But if you have ever encountered them in the wild they are a sight to behold. I've watched them hunt and play and stare back at you with an indifferent acknowledgment of your presence. I have to concur with Flores that coyote howling is truly America's original national anthem.

Clare O'Beara says

This enjoyable and easily readable book looks at the coyote, from prehistory when it split with the grey wolf line and trotted across the Bering landbridge to form the jackal tribe, to modern times when, with wolves almost extinguished, it has free rein to reproduce in almost every American state.

I learnt a lot and have to admire the resilient dog which is the target of persecution by farmers and city dwellers alike. Coyotes prey on rodents and rabbits, keeping down pests, but are considered pests themselves. With native legends of the Trickster behind them and an uncertain future ahead, the coyote is a fascinating topic and reflection of change on the American continent.

I downloaded a copy from Net Galley for unbiased review.

Cheryl says

Not a super fast read, but short enough that I wanted a bit more. I mean, it had lots of history, biology, philosophy... but it could have used just a couple more Coyote Trickster tales. It did have plenty of statements that make me feel outraged at how much taxpayer money has been spent murdering coyotes in a futile attempt to eradicate them, when the truth is that their population would stabilize at a reasonable level if they didn't have to over-breed and over-migrate to try to find a safe place in which to nurture their families.

"[For a] mind conflicted about 'sin' and 'virtue'; self-interest versus cooperation; games of love and status; new experiences to jolt neuro-chemistry and emotional states: [what better] for the long-ago Americans who selected a part human, part coyote as a suitable avatar for understanding themselves...."

"Because they are in large measure commentaries on human nature, Coyote stories belong to all of us for the same reason's Shakespeare's plays or Dostoyevsky's novels do."

(I need to look for art by Karl Bodmer.)

(And reread Aldo Leopold for his story about shooting a wolf, which experience contributed to his ideas about the 'biotic community' and the role of predators.)

"Although not many cat owners will want to hear it, increasing numbers of studies indicate that when coyotes come to town and pilfer the odd cat, the survivability of local songbirds goes up markedly."

"Just as coyote-wolf hybrids are preserving the genetics of nearly vanished wolves, we ourselves have preserved 20 percent of the genome of the extinct Neanderthals, dispersed in small snippets throughout global humanity." Including, it seems likely, blue eyes and fair skin.

Extensive "selected bibliography" but no annotation of same or direct notes, unfortunately. I trust that Flores knows his stuff, but there's no easy way to 'read further.'

Highly recommended not only to 'wildlife managers' but to any lay person interested in any subject related to predators of the US, ecology, land management, Wile E. Coyote, etc. etc.

The Pfaeffle Journal (Diane) says

Dan Flores writes in *Coyote America* "I have borne witness to certain truth about coyotes as neighbors: you do not see them as much as hear them." I live in an area where there is a large coyote population, I hardly ever see a coyote but I hear them all the time.

Dan Flores has written a richly detailed look at the America conservation movement and its attitude toward the coyote for the last century and half. A native of North America, the coyote has a rich history, which today continues to grow.

The coyote is a fascinating creature its ability to adapt and survive has spanned 10,000 years and made it a true American icon. When the first White people arrived in America they did not know what to make of this "prairie wolf" but they did sense a threat, I had no idea that the government has waged a century old battle for the eradication of the coyote.

Early on the National Park Service was devising methods to eradicate wolves, mountain loins and coyotes. It was all out warfare - they shot and poisoned these animals without regard. They murdered these animals in the thousands.

Once again you run into what I feel is a continuing theme in present day American life. Is what we are doing the best for all of us or are we catering to the few? I feel this book shows that once again we have lost our way, we are continuing to do what we always have and it's not really working. Is there away we can co-exist with nature and the other inhabitants of this planet?

This review was originally posted on The Pfaeffle Journal

Joshua Buhs says

Coyote deserves better.

I like coyotes. I like the animals. I like the idea of them--existing by their wiles in the shadow of humans. I like the representations. Speaking of wiles, I like Wile E. Coyote. I wanted to like this book. But it just never added up.

Flores was one of the scholars to bring environmental history into the academy, though he was never as famous as William Cronon or Donald Worster. Broadly speaking, this book is an example of environmental history: how humans have thought about and interacted with one part of nature, the Coyote. That's the core of the book.

Which is one of the problems. The ground that Flores covers here was already covered, and better, by Thomas Dunlap, years ago. The story beats are expected, following Dunlap closely: the rise of government agencies to help agriculturalists in the West; tension between basic biological research and killing programs; the expansion of government work during the middle of the twentieth century. The turn against killing programs in the 60s and 70s, as well as their continuation on a smaller scale as they are continually protested.

Flores adds some bits to the history, with an intensive look at how coyotes came to be named. But there's nothing remarkable about this part of the story. Lots of animals endured similar taxonomic confusion in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th. Otherwise, the book spends its middle chapters on the attempts to destroy coyotes as varmints--ridiculous lengths taken to support the nation's vanishing sheepherders.

And it didn't even work. Despite continued pressure on the coyotes, including despicable hunting rodeos, the animals have held their own. Attempts to kill the animals may have even helped coyotes, as their reproductive rate seems to vary with environmental pressures, increasing in response to threats and stresses.

Otherwise, there's a brief cultural history of the coyote, at the beginning, and then squirreled away in an epilogue. The opening concentrates on coyote as a Native American trickster, and there's some throat-clearing about the symbolic connections between humans and coyotes that is never really followed up. The epilogue hides some of the best material--Twain on coyotes and Wile E. Coyote and a host of cultural representations that could have been infused through the book. Dunlap did so to make sense of changing responses to predators--it was culture that transformed wolves from villains to heroes--but Flores does not attempt to explain the changes he documents. The most surprising bit of the book's subtitle--a supernatural history--is a promise not kept.

The best part of the book, for my money, was a consideration of the coyotes history over the last few thousand or so years, as they spread out from the North American southwest, in part riding the coattails of Native Americans. They have always been drawn to urban areas. Flores wants this to be significant on some level, but he doesn't really explain how. He also misses a chance to take up recent themes in evolutionary studies. Common-ness has become a characteristic worthy of study. Only a few species are common, and remain so even in the wake of humans; coyotes are one. What does this say about them? And does it promise their survival? There's evidence that passenger pigeons, once the most common bird in North America, was vulnerable to extinction exactly because they were common: when their numbers declined, finding mates and food became difficult. Are coyotes similarly vulnerable?

Instead of engaging these questions, Flores blends together several narrative strategies in a melange that is not successful. He attempts to write (or re-write) some Native American stories about coyote in his own voice; but then leaves that technique behind. He does history--but then uses explanatory devices that jar with most history. He invokes "genetic memory" at least three different times (once to explain why humans dislike predators, once to explain why prairies are important to humans--even though eh also has to admit that prairies are much maligned.) He scoffs at Americans use of HVAC systems to keep their houses like the African savannah. (Is that really what's going on.)

Elsewhere, he blends in personal vignettes, often at the end of chapters, which are meant to show his connection to coyotes. But these felt mostly flat to me. Amid these various different styles, he will suddenly--and without warning--slip into something closer to science journalism, mentioning people he's talked to, the interviews and lectures he's done, the settings and looks of the people. I could see how these might be integrated into his story, but they mostly feel like sore thumbs.

For all that, the book isn't bad. It's disjointed and not particularly novel. But if you haven't read a lot of environmental history, it might be news. Still, I think of the opportunity missed. My standard for books such as this one is William Leach's *Butterfly People*, which brilliantly blended cultural and environmental history. There are hints of a Leachian story here--especially in the few pages that Flores narrates the tale of the Murie brothers--but it is never developed, the story sticking, instead, to familiar trails.

Coyote deserves better.

David Rush says

Is the coyote howl beautiful or "blood curdling", or nothing at all? How you answer that will likely determine what you think of this book, or even if you might read it.

Maybe it is the reverse of "familiarity breeds contempt", but my unfamiliarity with wild predators makes them all the more fascinating. However stacked against a 100 year war of eradication against coyotes (and other species) my view seems pretty irrelevant.

Part of the book is obviously about the uniqueness of the coyote, and pointing out that many of the qualities people denigrate them for, when considered from a different perspective are shockingly the same behaviors and adaptability that allowed humans to succeed so well. In fact he begins by reminding us that many native American mythologies had coyote as a principle and complex character. BUT the other theme is how we view the natural world as opposed to our human world. And he tells the slow, slow story of awareness of non-humans as beings who at least deserve consideration.

(Aldo Leopold had argued)...*a revolutionary principle in human affairs: a recognition that other species possess an innate right to exist.* Pg. 161

Are coyotes, or any animal really, just "things" that can be moved like furniture, ignored or killed with no real need to consider anything other than our own personal whims?

BUT, it is actually more than that, because it goes beyond personal interest or need, since the drive to kill goes way beyond rational thought.

The science shows that putting bounties on coyotes does little to nothing to curb their population, but some states persist in paying bounties, as in Utah at \$50 a head, so that in 2014 over 7,000 coyotes were killed.

And by this time we know the coyote extermination project had been a decades long spectacular failure (as opposed to the work on killing wolves).

The determination and zeal of all kinds of people to kill, and kill, and kill coyotes is simply astounding. There have been millions of wolves and coyotes killed starting in the 19th century. And in our own times the government still spends millions of dollars to appease cattlemen, so much so that in 2013 four million wild critters were killed, with over ½ million coyotes killed between 2006 and 2011.

And beyond just plain human deadly cussedness, it can also be a political point, such as to fight the “specter of environmentalism” the political champion was Ronald Reagan. Reagan, who with an executive order right after taking office “...not only overturned Carter’s ban on killing coyote puppies in their dens but reversed Nixon’s landmark poison ban from ten years earlier.” Pg. 170

You never hear about Reagan the puppy killer.

So, am I fool to think we should give thought to other creatures, consider they have a place in the world even if they are scary?

About some of the more renowned naturalists who straddled the old ways and new considerations...

“Concern for the coyote itself. Murie knew that once, in his Yellowstone research, his brother had stood rapt, watching a coyote trot along a trail with a sprig of sagebrush in its mouth. At repeated intervals it had tossed the sprig joyously into the air, caught it, then trotted on. Why had so many in the bureau, without any science to back them up, so hated an animal that took that kind of pleasure in being alive in the world?” Pg. 142

Of course I know there will be a big group of people who take the above as pointless sentimentalism.

I am sentimental, but I might also be right to think, like this author, that we all have a place in the world.

Final thoughts...yes a good book but I have to say it still left me a little wanting. Many years ago I read Barry Lopez's Of Wolf and Men and remember it affecting at a deeper level. So I may try to re-read it.

Trish says

Dan Flores has done something fascinating in this book, rehabilitating the image of a persecuted carnivore lowest on our opinion roster of animals, including cockroaches and rats. He makes the case that coyotes should be America’s national avatar, displacing the bison or buffalo. Extremely clever, adaptable, and pioneering, the coyote was designated a principal deity by American Indians--North America’s oldest deity, responsible for creating all of North America.

Flores tells us that coyotes live within a couple miles of us at all times now...even those of us in major metropolitan areas. Coyotes are cosmopolitan, and have been living in urban areas since the time of Columbus at least. They are perceptive, wily fellow-travelers with us.

”Suffice it to say here that as we humans head off into an uncertain and probably dangerous future of our own making, it might be wise to keep an eye on [coyotes]. I, for one, am going to be very interested in how coyotes cope with the twenty-first century and what insights we might draw about our own circumstances from a coyote history that so often seems to mirror

ours.”

Coyotes are predators, feeding mainly on small mammals, birds, or fruits and they are sociable, hunting in packs. Contrary to the notion that coyotes were responsible for cattle kills, they were nearly always scavengers of large animals as befit their position in the ranking of predators in the larger ecosystem. Very nearly killed off as pests since the end of the nineteenth century, they have none-the-less persevered.

Flores suggests we look to the Indian coyote stories, of which there is a rich seam, to understand human nature: “who better to illustrate that than self-centered, gluttonous, carnal Coyote?” As we began to understand our own animal natures, the study of other social animals leaves “little doubt that...canines also understand equality and inequity...and experience both a rudimentary form of empathy and some basic theory of mind...an essential sense of what in human terms we would call 'right and wrong.'”

Employees of the Wildlife Services’ Predator Research Center, whose greatest advocate is the American sheep industry, is responsible for killing by aerial shooting roughly 35,000 coyotes from the air annually. Even they readily admit that coyotes have personality: “They’re individuals. Like people, some get into trouble.” Sheep farmers claim to lose some percentage of lambs to coyote packs every year. The federal government spends an equal amount of money (the cost of the lambs) to kill or sterilize coyote. Hmmm...a good use of federal tax dollars?

This book is a wildlife biologist’s dream. Readable, eloquent, well-argued, it looks at coyote history from many angles and leads even those of us with reason to dislike the disruptive canines to a grudging admiration and wonder. Of course, sport hunters probably don’t read peer-reviewed ecological articles, but Flores points out that ecosystems tend to develop some balances in response to threats and flourishing in their environment. Trying to kill coyotes takes natural balances out of the equation.

Flores ends with examples of coyote in art, and reminds us again how the animal is portrayed as a caricature of human nature, for example Wile E’s comic overconfidence (remind you of anyone?), unswerving obsession with a goal, and unfailing faith in technology. (Even that swath of red-gold hair has something of the coyote about it.) But I don’t want to carry the metaphor too far. After all, coyote in modern day parlance means a person who sneaks illegal aliens into the U.S. from Mexico.

NPR's David Greene interviewed Dan Flores about this book on coyotes.

Dan Flores is a historian, A.B. Hammond Professor Emeritus at University of Montana-Missoula, who has written several books about the American West and the animals who reside there. This year he also published a book called *American Serengeti: The Last Big Animals of the Great Plains*, perhaps in conjunction with the movement by Sean Gerrity, president of American Prairie Reserve, committed to wildlife conservation and hoping to create the largest wildlife complex ever assembled in the continental United States. "When complete, the reserve will comprise some 3.5 million contiguous acres (more than 5,000 square miles) of native grassland in northeastern Montana, with a goal of restoring the wildlife abundance the landscape once contained." [National Geographic bio].

Here is Dan Flores addressing the 32nd National Cowboy Poetry gathering about the history of America's Serengeti, and here is Sean Gerrity at an Aspen Institute gathering to elicit donations for his project.

?Kimari? says

Coyote America looks at the history of coyotes and their relationship with wolves and humans. Flores provides answers to why coyotes are so wide ranging, adaptable, and comfortable in urban areas. Coyote

America includes an extensive bibliography and index, which I will be perusing for further reading. I learned quite a bit, even if much of it was disturbing and disheartening. While there are no graphic descriptions, this book discusses extermination and culling; if you are sensitive, this might not be the book for you.

I've always been fond of coyotes. For two and a half years, I lived at the edge of a forest preserve. It was wonderful, I could sit on my patio and enjoy the cool air from the forest while watching the wildlife. It was not unusual to see a coyote loping along the tree line, even during the day. I cherish those moments, every one.

The community I lived in clearly wasn't as enamored. Neighbors frequently complained about the wildlife. They didn't like the birds because singing woke them too early, raccoons out during daylight must be rabid, owls hooting (or coyotes yipping) were hunting their pets, and all other manner of nonsense. If you don't like animals, why choose to live next to a forest preserve? If you want your pets (and wildlife) to be safe, don't let them outside to roam alone.

Several times I woke to rifle shots in the forest preserve and the sound of panicking coyotes. For many nights afterward, the remaining pack would gather and mourn. It's the only word that can adequately describe their whimpering yips and howls, which were so different to their usual playful banter. It's one of the most mournful sounds I have ever heard.

I guess another complaint about threatening or "rabid" coyotes resulted in the culling. It's the animal equivalent of believing any non-white wearing a hoodie is a criminal. It's beyond sickening. Yes, unfortunately, pets and people have been attacked by coyotes and other wildlife. But, consider this, there is a higher chance of being hit by a car than being attacked by a wild animal. And yet, we don't poison drivers or cull cars, in spite of that fact.

You might also enjoy:

Nonfiction

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- ★ The Ninemile Wolves
- ★ The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in the Wild

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Fiction & Mythology

- ★ Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping with His Daughter
- ★ Green Grass, Running Water
- ★ The Wolf Border

Leo Walsh says

Coyote America is a super interesting book that examines the science, history and cultural "markers" of our American original, the coyote. They look like smaller wolves, but they're smarter. And like the author, I thought they were a southwestern/ desert animal. So I was shocked when I first saw one in Ohio in the early 90's. I spent hours pouring over field guides, and was wavering between a fox and some kind of a stray sheep dog. I finally went to a ranger, and they pulled out a picture.

I was shocked when it was labeled 'coyote.'

Flores' treatment of the animal, and its relationship to both Native American and European peoples is telling. The Indians worshiped Old Man Coyote as a trickster god. They accepted him and other animals as fellow travelers on this planet. While Europeans hunted them down in a failed attempt to "tame" the untameable. He even takes the cultural history into my days as a kid, watching Wiley Coyote on Looney Toons every Saturday.

Very informative and enjoyable. Especially when it gets to post WWII America, where Flores uses the coyote as a window onto our environmental policy. Since it reveals a lot about American culture. From our desire to command and control. To our wanton destruction of predators using poisons. And very illuminating for the post-60's world. Since coyotes, it turns out, are sort of a cultural keynote species that shows the transition from farmers and ranchers to college educated urbanites. Since the ranchers want coyotes dead since they kill livestock, while urban professionals who "worship" these wild animals... on PBS while sipping lattes and munching kale chips.

Great science read. Four stars.

Ms.pegasus says

Numerous authors have already delved into the cultural and scientific research on the coyote, a uniquely American animal. Flores lists these works in his extensive bibliography and mentions some of them in the text of his book. In **COYOTE AMERICA** he documents a long history of destructive and inhumane government policies driven by that familiar triumvirate: fear, greed and hubris.

The "conquest of the west" has a familiar ring. Paired alongside it was the "war on predators." (The metaphors roll off the tongue so thoughtlessly). It's disheartening to realize that only 125 years after Lewis and Clark saw their first wolves, those same animals had been driven to near extinction. Mission accomplished? Hardly. The government next turned its attention to coyotes.

Flores' book is particularly timely; his historical account is relevant to anyone attentive to the dynamic of government policy-making. In 1886 Congress created the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy within the Agriculture Department. Initially, its task was scientific and educational. It conducted field surveys and wildlife censuses. But a government bureau needs funding to stay alive. A little over a decade later, it morphed into the Bureau of Biological Survey. By 1907 the head of the Bureau, Vernon Bailey, was advocating an extermination program for wolves, coyotes and mountain lions. This was a mission that taxpaying ranchers and their Congressmen were happy to fund. Not even national parks like Yellowstone were off-limits. By 1914 Congress passed an explicit eradication appropriation. By the 1920's, the Bureau was upgraded to the Division of Predatory Animal and Rodent Control. Today, it's called the

Division of Wildlife Services (the USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service Wildlife Service to be precise). Flores comments on this bland-sounding euphemism: “...*Wildlife Services was a frontier subsidy carryover whose primary mission was still killing.*” (p.171) Even today, it's primary methods are still poison, aerial gunning and trapping, honed by its labs at the Wildlife Services Research Center. “...*Wildlife Services quietly spends \$140 million of our taxpayer dollars a year not to serve wildlife but primarily to subsidize agribusiness.*” (p.172)

Any discussion of political decision-making is complicated, and Flores condenses these events in a book of some 248 pages. His narrative meanders. He is unapologetic about his own passion, which in this book is contagious. To me, a parting conversation from his visit to the Wildlife Services Research Center was telling. He repeatedly lobs softball questions about research into non-lethal methods of predator control and collaboration with environment advocates. The answer he receives is dismissive: “*Our greatest advocate is the American sheep industry. That's who we work with.*” (p.179) It is unwitting confirmation of the point Flores has been making. Once a bureaucracy's mission and funding source are defined, it becomes impervious to a change of direction. New research and changes in public opinion fall on deaf ears. With robotic efficiency, such a bureaucracy will cling to the same agenda under the cover of euphemisms and opacity. Flores traces a parallel history of ecological research and resistance to the implications of that research by Wildlife Services.

However, this book does not use the coyote solely as a proxy. Flores is most engaging in passages specific to the coyote. We learn that ironically, wolf extermination created a coyote nirvana. Coyotes no longer needed to worry about falling prey to wolves. Second, coyote extermination triggered a change in their reproduction pattern. As their population diminished, their litter sizes increased, and females began to reproduce at earlier stages of maturity. Without enemies, they also became less cautious. A flexible social structure permitted them to operate either alone or in packs. Rodents form a large part of their diet. Areas where coyotes were eradicated suffered infestations of rabbits and mice. Despite the eradication policies, the coyote population expanded its range and size. Today, even major cities have spotted coyotes in their midst.

Flores also describes the gruesome way that poisons work. If nothing else, the practice is inhumane, as people whose pets have accidentally ingested the bait can attest. I was also shocked that public coyote hunting contests are permitted. A photo captioned “Coyotes discarded in the desert, the aftermath of a coyote-hunting contest in New Mexico, in 2015” (p. 185) depicts the ugly result of this so-called recreational sport.

Coyotes figure prominently in Native American myth. They are clever, mischievous, jealous, generous, selfish, lascivious, and amoral. Flores suggests it indicates a different world view. Like Coyote, man embodies all of these features. His curiosity fuels dissatisfaction; his dissatisfaction is the root of his ingenuity, invariably resulting in unintended consequences. Coyote is an avatar for man. As opposed to questions of good and evil, Coyote's world accepts wondrous surprise and grim outcomes. It's the obverse of a vision of order and fixed perfection. Those emotions were conveyed in a tradition of animated oral storytelling. “*Coyotism tells us that while we may long have misunderstood the motives for our behavior, we've also long known how human nature expresses itself. And who better to illustrate that than self-centered, gluttonous, carnal Coyote?*” (p.42)

Flores' writing is undisciplined and even at times awkward. I award Flores' book four stars because of the importance of his message. It is a thought-provoking overview of our relationship with this resilient animal.

Lark Benobi says

To me Konrad Lorenz's essay "The Taming of the Shrew" in his collection King Solomon's Ring is a wondrous example of great field biology writing. In it, Lorenz delights in describing the behavior of the water shrew, and he does so with meticulous, loving detail, and through this tiny lens, focused on one tiny animal, I can't help but be struck with wonder about how beautiful and complicated the natural world is.

In contrast, Coyote America is filled with breathless anecdote and extends in every direction, introducing topics only tangentially related to coyotes. As a result it felt shallow to me. It felt like the author assumed I would need to be constantly entertained and distracted by interesting anecdotes or I'd lose interest.

It seems to be a style of science writing that has become pervasive, and maybe it reflects accurately the distractions of modern media on our reading attention, but I don't like it. By the end I was very much yearning for a re-read of Voyage of the Beagle, a book whose author knew that animals in themselves are worthy of being studied closely, and need no distraction or amplification to hold a reader's interest...what current science writers no longer seem to believe.

Bobby says

Forced to describe Coyote America in one phrase, I'd call it a celebration of the resiliency of the underappreciated canine that has inhabited North America far longer than Europeans. Though the book does begin with an appreciation via Native Americans, much of the book is basically a history of the coyote and the lack of appreciation of, and persecution of, the wolf's diminutive cousin. Once mankind had essentially won the battle against wolves in the lower 48 states, we turned our attention and sights to the "archpredator of our time" via bounties and government agencies that have used everything from firearms to poison to helicopters to attempt to eradicate an animal that, for the longest time, we could not even claim to understand. The coyote persevered by being perpetually elusive, very smart, and producing more offspring during times of the most intense attacks. Eventually the coyote emerged somewhat victorious, showing up in unexpected places like major American metropolises like L.A., Chicago, and even New York City. In the meantime, a shift occurred in the American attitude towards coyotes, particularly during the 1960's as we came to understand the interconnectedness of nature through books like Rachel Carson's Silent Spring and Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac as well as films by the likes of none other than Walt Disney.

Coyote America shines a light on the underappreciated coyote, forever the little stepbrother to the wolf, via a Native American appreciation, history, the sciences, popular culture, and a modern ecologically friendly viewpoint. The reader will not be able to help but cheer a creature that has proven to be so resilient and has continued to evolve right before our eyes. In the end, one cannot help but appreciate the coyote for coming out on the other side of a man made attempt at their extinction prospering and, perhaps, even smiling, so to speak. Flores does a wonderful job at making us see this brilliant creature in a way that many of us may not have seen it previously.

Laura Leaney says

I have to give this book five stars for the impact it had on my understanding of the human species' drive to destroy what it doesn't understand or appreciate. The book functions as both an ode to the intelligence and beauty of the coyote but also as a mournful dirge to America's deeply dysfunctional relationship to nature.

It's unbelievable that the country still kills 500,000 coyotes a year, despite the awareness that such wholesale slaughter causes coyote families to produce larger and larger litters. "That is only the current body count in a history that easily wins them the title of most persecuted large mammal in American history."

One of the reasons I picked up this book is the absolute hysteria generated by urban coyote sightings in my small city. Certain strong voices want them trapped, relocated, or poisoned. If these citizens had their way all three methods would suffice. Despite the occasional cat carcass, I've had a difficult time understanding this mindset (and I have cats). Perhaps I don't understand my neighbors' antagonism because coyotes and wolves have always fascinated me. In the dark nights at my grandparents' farm, all us kids could hear the coyotes do that howling-yipping thing they do with each other. It was so loud that we were sure they were right in the yard beneath our window. Somewhere back in those days I fell in love with wild animals. And, despite the fact that I would have no trouble killing one to protect my own life, I cannot fathom the wholesale slaughter of the planet's predators. Actually, that's not true. It's always about profit, isn't it?

Dan Flores's book is as much about human nature as it is about the coyote, and the news - at least for me - isn't positive. The sections on poisoning, especially strychnine and thallium sulfate, were difficult to get through and ultimately pissed me off. I wanted to punch something. Flores alludes to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and its terrible warning about "the profligate and unexamined use of insecticides" to curb weeds and pests, but his book is no less important.

Despite the blueness I felt after finishing *Coyote America*, there is some optimism in the author's belief that *Canis latrans* will survive our efforts to remove it from the planet. Flores writes, "Coyotes have been in North America far longer than we, they are not going anywhere, and history demonstrates all too graphically that eradicating them is an impossibility." I want this badly to be true. As soon as I quit my job, I want to live in a place where I can hear their song once again.

Lara says

I recently read *American Wolf: A True Story of Survival and Obsession in the West* and loved it, so when I stumbled across this one I was hoping for something with just as much depth. This...didn't really have it.

I liked Flores's premise that coyotes and humans have a connection because we're so similar in so many ways; that the way they've managed to survive and thrive despite the all-out war waged against them can offer us hope in our own difficult times; that they're beneficial and inspirational and beautiful. But he's kind of all over the place--unfocused, clearly biased, and sometimes doing that thing that drives me crazy in nature writing: personifying what his subject must be thinking or feeling.

Still, there are definite moments that made me *feel*, and I certainly have my own coyote story, as I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house on Mount Helix in La Mesa, California as a child and they would leave food out for the coyotes, who would come right up on the porch and stare at me through the glass as I watched them in the dark (guys, DON'T FEED THE COYOTES).

I've always had a soft spot in my heart for them because of that experience, but I feel like...I don't know. This book just isn't likely to win anyone over who doesn't already feel respect for coyotes because Flores so clearly has no respect for those folks. I found him...kind of a snobby jerk at times.

Definitely read *American Wolf*, but I feel like there may be better books about coyotes out there. Or if there aren't, there should be.

Carly says

If you weren't aware that the American War On Coyotes has been going on for longer than Vietnam, had more casualties than the Civil War, and was even more futile than the War On Drugs, you're in for a surprise.

I must admit to a certain fondness for coyotes. When I lived in Texas, I loved hearing their howls at dusk, their shapes framed against stark treeless hills and tall houses. I think they're gorgeous creatures, as far removed from the Looney Toons Coyote as a bean sprout from a redwood. While wolves are perhaps dearer to my heart, a coyote loping along a grassy trail is a rare and wonderful sight. So I have to admit that I was utterly shocked to discover that the US has been waging constant war on coyotes for well over a century.

Flores takes us from the dawn of coyote history and their tumultuous relationship with wolves to their first interactions with people. Coyotes were a semi-divine figure, both trickster and the butt of every joke, to an impressive number of Native American groups. For the Yanas and Navajos, Coyote was even bringer of death. Coyotes, or "coyotl," to give them the original Aztec name, have always been a cosmopolitan species, and they've apparently been living in urban environments for millennia: even the center of Tenochtitlan has an alley named "Coyoacan" ("place of the coyote"). Flores starts with the original myths ("The only thing smarter than coyote is God"), then takes us from Lewis and Clarke's "prairie wolves" to Twain's diatribe of them as "spiritless and cowardly" to the 1920 Scientific American article that proclaimed them as the "ORIGINAL BOLSHEVIK."

Flores estimates that we're still killing about half a million coyotes per year--that's about one per minute. Early Americans believed that their new country suffered from a "predator problem," and that wolves-- and to a lesser degree, coyotes-- needed to be extinguished to "save" both farmers and wildlife. (Apparently they never stopped to wonder how the deer managed before their arrival.) Settlers tried everything from lacing carcasses with strychnine powder to introducing sarcoptic mange into the wild canid populations. In the early 1900s, bounties for coyote "scalps" took about 1/3 of Montana's annual budget. Wolf populations collapsed, but coyotes, now viewed as "*the archpredator of our time*," remained constant. The Division of Biological Survey, created in the late 1800s, used only about 3% of its budget for scientific study. It saw its mission as solving the "predator problem," and it did so with gusto: by the mid-1920s, they had set out over 3.5M poison bait stations across the US. Hoover's "Animal Damage Control Act" earmarked \$1M/year of federal funds for the eradication of coyote and other pests. The Biological Survey and Forest Service would eventually carpetbomb massive tracts of land with a series of poisons, including sodium cyanide, thallium sulfate, and Compound 1080--one which is still used today. As one member of the bureau put it during WW2:

"I hope I have three celebrations coming--when we whip Hitler and Hirohito and when we kill that damn coyote."

So how did coyotes survive? Flores postulates that their resilience is unique: they have fission-fusion societal structures, long childhoods where they can learn caution from their parents, and an impressive ability to increase litter size under environmental pressure from 5.7 pups to as many as 19. As secondary predators to wolves and later dogs, they learned vigilance and flexibility, even in diet: they're omnivorous, primarily eating small creatures such as mice, gophers, grasshoppers, and crickets, but they'll also happily scavenge for

berries and plants as well as carrion. Their survivability in cities--sheltered from the aerial gunning of the country--is as high as that of national parks.

Flores takes us through all this and much else besides, from the effects of "The Great Dog War" of the mid-1800s to Disney's pivotal role in changing America's perspective on the coyote to the eventual political embrace of biocentrism to the repercussions of the first recorded death by coyote in 1980s LA. The book is utterly fascinating. My only caveat is that it's difficult to take the book without a grain of salt or two, and I ended up spending a lot of time fact-checking various statements. For example, he credulously repeats the old chestnut about canids only seeing in black and white, and his own political beliefs--in particular, a surprisingly virulent hatred of Reagan--strongly color his narrative. His portrayal of red wolves, too, seemed to me to be incomplete, containing only the facts that support the narrative he wants. (I do, however, agree with Flores about the insanity of killing and sterilizing coyotes and wolf-coyote hybrids in the effort to preserve the "purity" of the red wolves.)

But what I simply couldn't wrap my head around was the American government's dogged determination to exterminate the coyote. The predator-killing bureau is still around--since 1997, it's been euphemistically known as the Division of Wildlife Services, and it killed about 4M animals in 2013, a good proportion of them coyotes. These days, they mostly shoot them out of planes, but they've also experimented with sterilization. If you're interested in coyotes and America's fraught relationship with environmentalism and predators, *Coyote America* is definitely worth a look.

~~I received an advanced reader copy of this book through Netgalley from the publisher, Basic Books, in exchange for my honest review.~~

Cross-posted on BookLikes.
