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## Coyotes abound in Upstate N.Y.

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**J. MICHAEL KELLY**  
**OUTDOORS WRITER**

When Europeans first colonized America, the coyote's range was limited to the Rocky Mountains and western Plains.

Now, says Dr. Robert Chambers, the canny predators are found in every state of the Union except for Hawaii, and in every New York county north of the Big Apple.

The retired former professor at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry should know. He's considered one of the nation's leading experts on wild canids.

He discussed coyotes and their impact on other wildlife Thursday, during the Baldwinsville Rod & Gun Club's banquet at Raphael's restaurant in Lakeland.

"The whole eastern United States is saturated with coyotes," he said.

Chambers, who lives in Parish, is sometimes serenaded by a pack of coyotes that roams within a mile of his house. He estimates Upstate New York counties now harbor between 20 and 40 coyotes per 100 square miles, on average - comparable to densities found in Idaho and Wyoming.

Coyotes steadily have expanded their range in North America and Mexico since the mid-1800s. They first arrived in New York sometime in the 1920s, to fill an ecological niche formerly occupied by wolves.

"Wolves were New York's original large wild canids," Chambers said.

The wolves disappeared from their historic range as people moved westward and eradicated their prey, which consisted chiefly of deer and beavers.

The extirpation of wolves left plenty of room for coyotes, which are programmed by nature to spread out into suitable, unoccupied habitats.

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"Young coyotes disperse from their place of birth when they are one or two years old," Chambers said.

One coyote that researchers at SUNY-ESF equipped with a radio collar was tracked from its mother's territory in Fort Drum in Jefferson County to Saratoga, approximately 150 miles away.

Eastern coyotes are larger than their scrawny western cousins. Thirty- to 40-pounders are common, and some range up to 80 or even 90 pounds.

Chambers attributes the extra heft to genetics. He believes coyotes occasionally cross-bred with larger wolves as they dispersed through southern Canada.

The Baldwinsville club members who share Chambers' interest in hunting leaned forward in their chairs when he came to the topic of the coyote's diet.

Coyotes scavenge deer that die of natural causes and they also run down and kill sick or healthy whitetails if the opportunity arises, he said.

Over the years, Chambers' students spent countless hours scrutinizing coyote droppings for fur and bones.

In the late 1970s, the researchers found that 83 percent of Adirondack coyote scats collected in the winter months contained deer hair. During the summer, 42 percent of samples taken from the same area had deer remains in them.

However, coyotes feed less often on deer and more frequently on small mammals and wild fruits in Central New York, according to the SUNY-ESF studies.

"One winter at Cross Lake (near Elbridge) I picked up 100 coyote scats that had nothing in them but corn and apples," Chambers said.

His bottom-line assessment is that although coyotes do relish venison, they have negligible impact on overall deer numbers in areas with good whitetail habitat.

As evidence of that conclusion, he noted the annual deer take by hunters in the Adirondacks has risen steadily during the last 20 years, in spite of coyote predation on the herd.

## Northeastern Sport Show set for Jan. 24-26

Highlight the dates of Jan. 24-26 on your calendars. That's when the 50th annual Northeastern Sport Show will be held at the New York State Fairgrounds Center of Progress.

Features lined up by the show promoters include a display of all six subspecies of American wild turkeys and a new lineup of seminars on bass fishing, turkey hunting and other outdoor topics.

We'll provide details as the show dates draw closer. J. Michael Kelly is the outdoors writer for The Post-Standard.

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