

Camera captures local coyotes' capers

By **Viola Brown**

Posted 2/3/16

Winter may have brought traffic to a stop last month, but coyotes are still on the move in Riverdale.

A camera monitoring the forest behind the Riverdale-Yonkers Ethical Culture Society has caught a number of the canids scampering and eating both day and night. Footage shows the coyotes feasting on squirrels, raccoons and other urban wildlife.

Biologist Ferdie Yau, who began researching coyote ecology in New York City in early 2014, hopes that the Gotham Coyote Project informs people about how to coexist with the animals.

"It's a beautiful thing that we are able to live with coyotes around here," said Mr. Yau, who is also a dog behavior counselor. "It shows you how life is changing around here, not just for people, but for the environment."

According to Mr. Yau, some of the area's coyotes are from Westchester or Connecticut and travel south in search of food. Others breed here and trek to Manhattan in search of new territory.

"Last winter, several coyotes were reported in Manhattan. One made it on top of a bar in Long Island City," recalled Mr. Yau.

He noted that people throughout the country's metropolitan areas have learned to live with coyotes, pointing to Chicago, which has a coyote population of about 2,000. Mr. Yau estimates there are about 20 coyotes in the Bronx, but he is unable to determine an exact number since individual coyotes often look like one another.

"I've done jaguar tracking in Belize and you are able to do a technique called mark and recapture," he said. "We can't do that with coyotes because they all look the same and have no individual markings."

After using bait and beaver scent, Mr. Yau and a group of high school students who are part of Wave Hill's Woodland Ecology Research Mentorship (WERM) determined that coyote scat from the Queens Zoo was the most effective means of luring coyotes to the motion-detection camera.

"Coyotes will mostly avoid humans," said the biologist. "When they move into a place like the Bronx, they become nocturnal, to avoid human contact." He insisted that the area's coyotes pose no serious threat to people.

Jone Johnson Lewis, leader of the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture at 4450 Fieldston Road, said the coyote cam contributes to her group's mission.

"The Ethical Society is really committed to issues around environmental justice and that includes taking care of the wildlife in our community," said Ms. Lewis.

Mr. Yau said if a coyote approaches you, give it space and make a lot of noise. He also advised keeping pets indoors, covering garbage and refraining from feeding coyotes.

"Just two weeks ago, one of my clients called me and said she saw one [coyote] on Cambridge Ave. and basically it walked away from her," said Mr. Yau. "They are doing a good job of avoiding us."