

A view transformed: from fear to understanding

*Based on conversations
with Janet Kessler*

A family of coyotes has recently moved its den to our ravine from elsewhere in the community. An alpha dad, an alpha mom, two yearlings, and three newborn pups feel safe among our eucalyptus trees and dense undergrowth. It's a sweet image, isn't it?

Yet, these are wild animals, not pets. At night they roam and hunt in the local neighborhoods (their self-determined territory is about 2 square miles). When they respond to local sirens with an orchestra of eerie howls, they can generate a ripple of fear and dread... and a lot of emails and phone calls to City authorities and to Arden Wood pleading to remove or relocate them. However, it's illegal to take any action against them. And so, for several months now, we have been praying diligently to demonstrate the fact that "all of God's creatures, moving in the harmony of Science, are harmless, useful, indestructible" (SH, 514:28–30).

Protect their wildness

Our prayers led directly to Janet Kessler, a woman we affectionately call "the Coyote Lady." Janet studies coyotes. She knows them by face and has named most of them—more than 80 of them!—in the 49 square miles that make up San Francisco. We met Janet walking the Arden Wood road with her dog, looking for coyote scat. Since that meeting, she has placed track cameras in our ravine to record the coyotes' behavior, and she comes almost every day to study them. Why is Janet so interested in these animals? In her words, "My end is to



increase the understanding of coyotes and their behavior and their intense family lives—to get it out to the public so we all cohabit peacefully and preserve existing wildlife habitat." Janet has been tracking these creatures for 14 years and shares her research with the University of California at Davis. She knows them all, but she has befriended none. They are wild animals, and she wants all of us to keep it that way—to protect the natural safety barriers between wild animals and mankind.

If we were to remove the coyotes, they would instinctively repopulate for self-preservation, and their absence would throw off the ecological balance of neighborhood gophers, voles and squirrels. If we let them be, they will continue to hold early evening family meetings, they'll sing in response to sirens, they will clean up the environment by eating carrion, and they'll keep their own population in check by preventing newcomers from entering their territory. And so, we now think of our coyotes as Hunter and Mouse, Filipa, Bent-tail, and the pups. But, we keep our distance!

Fun fact: Coyotes did NOT walk across the Golden Gate Bridge to reach San Francisco! They arrived in the bed of a pick-up truck! 🌿

This beautiful, 6-month-old coyote pup is "one of God's creatures"—part of the ecological balance surrounding mankind.

Photo courtesy of Janet Kessler.



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