

Coyotes vs. rabbits. There are two sides to every decision.

PHOTO BY JODY RUSSELL



Coyotes in our midst

I am not fond of rabbits. They are cute, I admit. But I was about 10 years old when one nipped at my finger. Cute or not, I am not fond of rabbits.

I have other reasons to dislike these bundles of fur and teeth. Hostas nibbled to nothing. Raspberry shrubs gobbled up. All 233 strawberries (count 'em!) eaten overnight before they were fully ripe. My beautifully flowering tamarisk shrub stripped first of its bark and finally, right down to the dirt. My tomato plants, sturdy and flowering, down one inch, then another, until finally, nothing showed above ground.

My dog waits at the window, perfectly still, ears alert and cries like she's in pain to get quickly outside after spotting a rabbit in the yard. She chases it. The rabbit runs frantically, racing in circles, the dog mirroring its moves, but never gets close enough.

One year, I decided to take matters into my own hands. Or should I say, into my right hand, with a dastardly looking slingshot (wrist rocket, really). For the first month, I shot the kids' marbles. Whether they noticed the disappearing toys, I don't know. I never hit a thing and the next time I weeded, I was pulling colorful pearly marbles from the dirt. I went into the local sporting goods store and found the perfect solution. Metal birdshot. I bought 1,000. Whether it was due to my inability to take aim via my wrist or my subconscious appreciation of cuteness, I just couldn't hit a rabbit. I became obsessed with The Rabbit. One morning, I saw one in the front, nibbling in the garden. I crept outside and took aim, flinging metal balls at the helpless rabbit. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a group of children and moms waiting for the school bus, watching me with horror. I sheepishly slipped inside.

This year, despite the dog and the slingshot, bunnies were born among the hostas and in the strawberry patch. Bunnies, their eyes shut, their tiny ears laid back against their heads, bundles of innocent furriness, snuggled together in warmth and safety. Irresistibly cute. What to do? Leave them be.

And then this autumn, on a day when the leaves had finally finished being swept up into bags, it hit me.

There were no more rabbits.

In their place was a lone coyote. The coyote has been busy. Crossing the quiet street at dawn and finding refuge for its daytime snooze. When we sleep, it eats the rabbits. I was working at my computer one morning when I heard an angry blue jay. The bird was in a tree behind my house, sending out an alarm. I grabbed my camera and quietly went outside. There it was. The coyote. Its fur was matted and mottled. The coyote looked at me. I looked at it through the long lens, bringing it closer than either of us would have preferred. I

saw its golden eyes, one slightly smaller than the other. An hour later, I went back into the woods, this time, near where I'd seen it. The coyote stood and watched me. I watched the coyote. The squirrels had scampered off and the woods were still. Dogs began to bark. It started off down the trail. I clicked and clicked. And then, the coyote stopped, looked over its shoulder at me, as if evaluating the situation. And trotted off.

I haven't seen the coyote since, except in the glow of its eyes that remain fixed in my mind.

It was furry and strong looking, its tail bushy and nearly touching the ground. Healthy. Wild. Eating up the rabbits. The coyote captivates me. I recall my childhood connotation surrounding coyotes – wily and clever; eager to get that roadrunner. Not too smart. Not too likeable. Stupidly clever. But I shed these images when I am face to face with the photo of the coyote, where it seems to look at me with the golden eyes saying, “Well, here I am.”

I complained about the destructive rabbits and got the coyote in their place. It's a trade. I can have too many rabbits or a contented coyote. Like all the tradeoffs in life, both sides have their benefits. When larger wildlife and suburbia overlap, there are certainly accommodations to be made to avoid collisions.

The coyote's presence makes me a bit edgy. Will it bother me when I walk my dog at night? What else does it eat? I know there was a recent fatal attack (October 2009) of a young folk singer in Canada. And certainly a single coyote is one thing; a pack of coyotes another. I don't know if the coyote will stick around my neighborhood this winter. I don't know if there are enough rabbits left to procreate and then provide sustenance. Or if the coyote will move on to another part of Eden Prairie to take care of their bunny issues.

I haven't seen the coyote in almost a week now. And of course, there are still no rabbits. Perhaps I misread that look on the trail. Perhaps the coyote was saying, “OK, fine. I'll leave.”

It serves as a reminder that there are two sides to every issue, tradeoffs to all our decisions and yearnings. Though I am still not fond of rabbits.



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prairie rustlings

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