

# TRACKS

A Publication of the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends

September–November

2005

## Super Dog: Your Everyday, Local Coyote

“...The consort of rattlesnakes and vultures; the tyrant of his inferiors... the pariah of his own race, and despised by mankind...he outstrips animals fleeter than himself and foils those of greater strength; and he excels all rivals in cunning intelligence.” —Unknown

If there were ever a competition for “charismatic outlaw” in the animal kingdom, the coyote would most certainly be a contender. Beloved as much as it is maligned, the coyote is among the few species that have actually expanded their territory in the face of urbanization. Indeed, they seem to have thrived despite man’s best efforts to eradicate them. Today, this member of the dog family is found from Alaska to Florida and from California to Maine.

### Physical Features

The word “coyote” is of Spanish derivation and has its origins in *Nautauhl*, the language of the Aztec Indians. Less exotic but certainly descriptive, the coyote’s scientific name, *Canis latrans*, translates as “barking dog.” Physically, the coyote measures from the nose to base of tail

approximately 32 to 37 inches. The bushy, black-tipped tail may be as long as 16 inches. Weight ranges from 20 to 50 lbs with females typically being smaller than males. The nose has a narrow pad and the ears are pointed. As with many of the dog species, there is a great variation in color ranging from combinations of gray or buff on the head, neck and back. Lower parts are generally a slightly lighter color.

It has been said that a number of the wild dog species look alike. This is particularly true, assuming size is ignored, for the coyote and wolf. Indeed, compare a big coyote with a small wolf, say researchers, and it would take a microscope to confirm the distinctions, namely the coyote’s larger brain cavity and slimmer muzzle. It is no a surprise, then, that coyotes have been known to breed with a wolf as well as with other *Canis* species, including domestic dogs.

### Behavior

It is in terms of behavior, however, that the differences between coyotes, wolves and other wild dog species become most apparent. Indeed, many scientists believe that it is their adaptive behavior and a flexible social structure that explains the coyote’s success living in and adjacent to the urban interface. For example, coyotes do not run in packs and are relatively tolerant of others of their species. Their social structure is based on a loose hierarchy where the young are subservient to adults, males are subservient to females, and females are supportive of other females (they will even raise young in the same den). In addition, coyotes mate for the long term and while they may be somewhat territorial, it is not to an exclusive degree. For this reason, the availability of food or a large kill can bring any number from outside a territory without conflict occurring.

The fact is that the coyote is not exclusive about anything! Adaptability is their hallmark. Typically, in preparation for a birth, the family may dig a den, or they may adopt one abandoned by another species. Any one den may be used for several years, so long as it is clean of fleas and remains accessible. In addition, the male mate and siblings from previous litters will often contribute to raising the new family. The male’s role, however, is usually limited to providing food by means of regurgitation.

These patterns are quite a contrast to the social behavior of wolves where the alpha male dominates the pack, intimidating other males in order to mate with the females and father most of the offspring. This said, it is worth noting that historically the pack structure has served the wolf species well, particularly for purposes such as taking down large prey (e.g., elk, deer, moose). Sadly, in recent years, the wolf has not thrived as well as the coyote. As a result, the species has largely abandoned much of their original territory in favor of more remote, less populated wild-lands. It is no surprise that the coyote, ever the opportunist, has stepped in to fill the role of predator that was subsequently left open by the wolf.

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## The Science of Clean Water

As a microbiologist, I've spent years looking at water samples under the microscope and I can tell you first hand that not only is water essential to life, it is teeming with life! A single drop of marine water is literally a "water world," containing a high diversity of tiny life forms, including microorganisms.



As a Supervising Public Health Microbiologist, one of my jobs is to oversee the laboratory testing of drinking and recreational waters for bacteria to ensure that it is safe for drinking or swimming. I work at the Orange County Public Health Laboratory's Water Quality Department Laboratory located at Shellmaker Island in Newport Beach. The laboratory is responsible for testing recreational water from Orange County's beaches and adjacent waters.

Water samples are collected by the County's Ocean Water Protection Program staff, who are also responsible for initiating beach postings and closures. Both departments also work together with outside agencies to investigate the sources and causes of bacterial pollution to coastal waters. In recent years, major scientific and technological advancements have led to significant improvements in water quality. At the same time, increased urban development has led to its deterioration.

Keeping the water clean and safe is of the utmost importance to sustaining our health and well being. When water is clean, it can revitalize and restore our land and our lives. Water Quality Department Laboratory and Ocean Water Protection staff are often questioned by concerned citizens as to the quality of their water, how it is tested and what measures are being taken to ensure its safety. In response, we would like to share this information with the community by offering an introductory class on the basics in water science, including laboratory test methods and water quality regulations used to determine posting or closing beaches. Topics that will be covered include:

- What diseases can I get from drinking or swimming in water?
- What are indicator bacteria?
- How often are my beaches tested?
- How clean are the beaches in Orange County?

To find the answers to these and more questions, please join us for our first "Water Quality 101" class to be held at the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center on November 1, 2005, 7:00–8:30 p.m. The class will be given by County Laboratory and Water Quality staff, is free of charge and geared towards adults, college and high school students who are interested in learning more about water quality. We look forward to seeing you!

*Donna Ferguson, Water Quality Laboratory Supervisor  
OC Health Care Agency*

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## Super Dog *(continued)*

### **Food**

When it comes to hunting, the coyote's reputation for being extremely fast and resourceful is well earned. Despite what have been called spindly legs, these animals are quick and lithe, capable of running up to 40 mph and clearing an eight-foot fence. They tend to hunt individually but, again, not exclusively. Occasionally, a pair may team up relay-style to run down a rabbit or other prey. In terms of eating, coyotes are equally as resourceful and decidedly not picky. In fact, the coyote is said to "eat anything animal or vegetable..." This means, in addition to their main diet of mice, rabbits and other rodents, everything from carrion to fallen apples to grasshoppers. Also, in contrast to most dog species, a coyotes will even cache uneaten food to have for another day.

As a predator, coyotes have been known to kill livestock. Coyote supporters say that only injured animals, maimed most likely by some rancher's trap, are killed. Historically, however, ranchers feel differently. Locally in Orange County, the concern is mostly for pets. Indeed, each year there are a number of cats and small dogs reported as being attacked, and sometimes killed by coyotes. No doubt, given the coyotes' natural instincts it is difficult for them to pass up what may seem like an "easy meal." As such, anyone with a small pet in coyote territory is advised to keep pets properly fenced or leashed and to feed them inside.

Assuming such precautions are taken, the coyote can be recognized for what he is— an important part of the ecosystem— rather than being labeled as a threat to man and his pets.

### **An Icon**

For all its brashness—or perhaps because of it—the coyote has staked a starring role in American culture. Pueblo, Apache and Navajo tribal traditions and stories all feature the coyote. Among the Navajos, in particular, "the coyote is an essential being... representing a vital force of restlessness and energy ...that moves between the categories of human-god-animal, good and evil, testing the forms and realities of the world."

Today, the coyote is still an essential being. Indeed, as one of the few remaining native predators in the region, he is an integral part of the ecosystem, a testament to the current health of Upper Newport Bay and a symbol of hope for the continued restoration of urban open space areas.

*Rosemary Flynn, Naturalist*

*For references and Coyote Safety Tips please go to [newportbay.org/newsand.htm](http://newportbay.org/newsand.htm)*



# Upper Newport Bay Calendar of Events

September–November 2005

## Steward Days—Every Wednesday, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

Protect the Bay's unique genetics by collecting seeds & propagating plants for our restoration sites. Learn how to grow natives in your backyard, attract wildlife and conserve water. For information call (949) 640-0286. Location code: BBSC

## Canoe the Back Bay—Every Saturday, 8:30 a.m.

Join a trained naturalist for a guided 2-hour canoe tour of the Back Bay. \$10/person, 8 & up. For reservations call (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC

## Kayak Tours—Every Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–Noon

Join a trained naturalist for a guided kayak tour of the Back Bay. Meet at the Newport Aquatic Center. \$15/person, 8 & up. \$10/NBNF members. Be prepared to get wet. Reservations (949) 923-2269. Location code: NAC

## Kayak Tours—Every Sunday, 10:00 a.m.–Noon

Join a trained naturalist for a guided kayak tour of the Back Bay. Meet at the Newport Dunes Resort. \$20/person. \$10/NBNF members. Parking fee. Reservations (949) 729-1150 or 729-3863. Location code: NDR

## Scout Programs—Tuesday through Saturday upon request

Join a naturalist for our 2 hour Brownie or Junior Girl Scout Try-it or Badge programs; or join us for Tiger Cub, Bear Cub or Webelo Badge programs. Call (949) 923-2269 or email scoutssi@sbcglobal.net. \$7/child includes patch. Location code: BBSC

## Plein Air Painting—Saturday, Sep. 3, Oct. 1, Nov. 5, 9:00 a.m.–Noon Wednesday, Sep. 14, Oct. 12, Nov. 9, 9:00 a.m.–Noon Sunday, Sep. 18, Oct. 23, Nov. 13, 1:00–4:00 p.m.

Enjoy a wonderful time painting the Back Bay. Jean Marie will present and demonstrate traditional Plein Air techniques. All materials are provided. \$15/child, 8-18, \$20/adult. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location Code: MIC

## Plein Air Painting for Kids—Saturday, Sep. 10, 1:00–2:30 p.m. (ages 5–7) Sunday, Sep. 11, 1:00–2:30 p.m. (ages 8–9) Sunday, Sep. 11, 3:00–4:30 p.m. (ages 10–12)

Students will learn the joy of painting from nature. Artists from SOCALPAPA will present and demonstrate traditional Plein Air techniques. All materials are provided. \$5/child. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location Code: MIC

## Monthly Naturalist Meeting—Thursday, Sep. 8, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Join the Naturalists for a presentation related to the Upper Newport Bay. Refreshments are at 6:30 p.m. and presentation is at 7:00 p.m. Free. For information call (949) 923-2269. Location code: MIC

## ROOTS Restoration Teamwork—Saturday, Sep. 10, Oct. 22, Nov. 12, 9:00 a.m.–Noon

Help restore Back Bay habitat by installing and maintaining native plants while learning about wetland ecology. Reservations required for groups of 5 or more. Refreshments, tools provided. (949) 640-0286 for information and location.

## Become a Marine Life Educator—Sept. 21, 23, 24, 8 a.m.–noon

Would you enjoy talking to kids while handling local marine life? Would you like to help protect and save our local bay and coastal environment? Training program begins Sept. 21. Information (949) 640-9956. Location code: BBSC

## Train for a Day, Become a Volunteer—Saturday, Sept. 24, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

Become a part of this dynamic estuary! Learn about the habitats and wildlife of the bay. Participate in habitat restoration and special events. Assist with tours. Greet and educate visitors. Registration (949) 923-2295. Location code: MIC

## Electric Boat Tour of the Bay—Saturday, Sep. 24, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, 11:30 a.m.

Join a Naturalist on a 2-hour guided tour of the bay on our comfortable electric pontoon boat. \$10/person. Reservations (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC

## Marine Discovery—Saturday, Sep. 24, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, 8:30–11:30 a.m.

Marine biology students ages 8 and up are invited to participate in a variety of marine life monitoring programs in Newport Bay. Under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Free. Reservations (949) 640-9956. Location code: BBSC

## Evening Marsh Prowl—Saturday, Sep. 24, Oct. 15, 7:30 p.m.

Join a Naturalist on a guided tour of the bay at dusk on our Back Bay Science Center boat. Use spotlights and binoculars to search for owls and other night creatures. \$10/person. Reservations (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC.

## Name the Stingray Open House—Saturday, Sep. 24, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

View the newborn baby stingrays in the tanks at the Back Bay Science Center. Submit name ideas for them as a part of our contest. Award handed out at October Shark Camp. Location code: BBSC.

## Twilight Canoe Tour with Barbecue—Saturday, Sep. 24, Oct. 15, 4:00 p.m.

Join Naturalists and Sea Scouts for a beautiful tour of the Reserve and dinner around the campfire at Shellmaker Island. Fee is \$25. Information and reservations (949) 642-5031. Location Code: BBSC.

## "How Insects Communicate"—Sunday, Sep. 25, 2:00–3:00 p.m.

"Dr. Sue, The Bug Lady" shares specimens from her traveling zoo and demonstrates how they communicate using fun activities. \$10/child, 5 & up. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location code: MIC

## Friends of Newport Bay Walking Tour—Saturday, Oct. 8, Nov. 12, 9:00, 9:15, 9:30, 10:00, 10:15 a.m.

Walk along the Back Bay listening to Naturalists and visiting Interpretive Stations featuring natural history specialists. Free. No reservations required. Information (949) 923-2269. Location code: EB

## Walking Tour—Saturday, Oct. 1, Oct. 15, Nov. 5, Nov. 19, 9:00 a.m.

Join a trained Naturalist for a 2-hour walk along the bay. Bring binoculars and sun protection. Free. No reservations needed. For information call (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC

## Naturalist Training—Begins Thursday, Oct. 6, 6:30–9:00 p.m.

Learn to be a Naturalist so you can conduct guided tours or do volunteer work at the Bay. A ten-week Naturalist training course is conducted on Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. \$25 fee. For information call (949) 923-2296. Location code: MIC

## Shark Camp at the Bay—Saturday, Oct. 15, 6:00 p.m.

Learn about the lives of sharks and rays while eating dinner around the campfire. Then help catch, tag and release them off our dock. Fee is \$25. Information and reservations (949) 642-5031. Location Code: BBSC.

## "Spectacular Spiders & Amazing Arachnids"—Saturday, Oct. 29, 10:00–11:30 a.m.

"Dr. Sue, The Bug Lady" shares specimens from her traveling zoo while you learn the facts behind the "Very Busy Spider" story. \$10/child, 5 & up. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location code: MIC

## Dr. Sue's Traveling Insect & Arthropod Zoo—Saturday, Nov. 19, 2:00–3:30 p.m.

"Dr. Sue, The Bug Lady" shares specimens from her traveling zoo while you watch, listen and touch. \$10/child, 5 & up. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location code: MIC

## Sharkmobile is available for your school

Sharkmobile is an outreach program that will bring sharks, ray, sea stars and other marine animals to your school. Participants will enjoy learning about local marine habitats through hands-on activities. Free. Information and reservations (949) 640-9956. Location code: BBSC

### Toddler Time

Join a Park Ranger for a parent-child experience with stories, movement and hands-on fun. Registration (949) 923 2275. Location code: MIC

## "Animal Senses"—Wed., Sep. 7, 10:30 (ages 3–4)

Learn about amazing animal senses.

## "Native Americans"—Wed., Sep. 21, 9:00 (ages 2–3) or 10:30 (ages 3–4)

Learn about native Americans who once lived in the Upper Newport Bay.

## "Birds of Prey"—Wed., Oct. 5, 10:30 (ages 3–4)

Learn about the birds of prey that inhabit the Upper Newport Bay.

## "Batty Bats"—Wed., Oct. 19, 9:00 (ages 2–3) or 10:30 (ages 3–4)

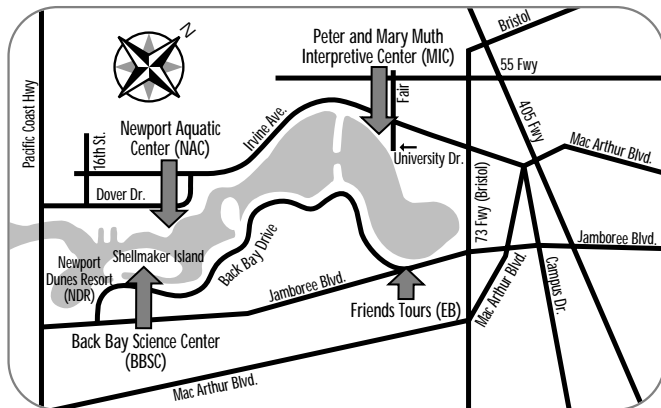
Learn all about bats including some that live near the Bay.

## "Quack, Quack, Waddle, Waddle"—Wed., Nov. 2, 10:30 (ages 3–4)

Learn about ducks in the Upper Newport Bay.

## "Birds"—Wed., Nov. 16, 9:00 (ages 2–3) or 10:30 (ages 3–4)

Playtime with a bird theme.



**WEB SITES**

Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends: [www.newportbay.org](http://www.newportbay.org)  
 Peter & Mary Muth Interpretive Center:  
[www.ocparks.com/unbic](http://www.ocparks.com/unbic)  
 Back Bay Science Center: [www.backbaysciencecenter.org](http://www.backbaysciencecenter.org)  
 California Coastal Commission: [www.coastal.ca.gov](http://www.coastal.ca.gov)

**TRACKS CREDITS**

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**LOCATION KEY**

Peter and Mary Muth  
 Interpretive Center (MIC)  
 2301 University Drive  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

Back Bay Science Center (BBSC)  
 600 Shellmaker  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

Newport Aquatic Center (NAC)  
 1 Whitecliffs Drive  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

**21<sup>st</sup> Annual Coastal Cleanup Day  
 at Upper Newport Bay**

**When:** Saturday, Sept. 17 from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**Where:** Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center  
 2301 University Drive (at Irvine Ave.)

Organized by Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends; Orange County Harbors, Beaches & Parks; and California Dept. of Fish and Game. This is the one day of the year we are able to enter many sensitive areas of Upper Newport Bay to remove harmful and unsightly trash. Please come and help us.

Free lunch.  
 Families welcome.

General Information: (949) 923-2269 or [newportbay.org](http://newportbay.org)

Group (10+) Registration:  
 (949) 923-2295

Water Cleanup Registration:  
 (949) 640-9956



**3<sup>rd</sup> Annual SOCALPAPA Paints Back Bay**

**When:** Saturday & Sunday, October 15 & 16  
 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Where:** Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center  
 2301 University Drive (at Irvine Ave.)

Organized by Newport Beach Arts Foundation; Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends; Orange County Harbors, Beaches & Parks; and Southern California Plein Air Painters Association—sponsored by Bauer Jaguar. Includes the show and sale of original artwork of 80 or more artists. 30% of the proceeds go to the Naturalists & Friends.

More information: Call (949) 923-2269 or visit [newportbay.org](http://newportbay.org) or [www.socalpapa.com](http://www.socalpapa.com)

