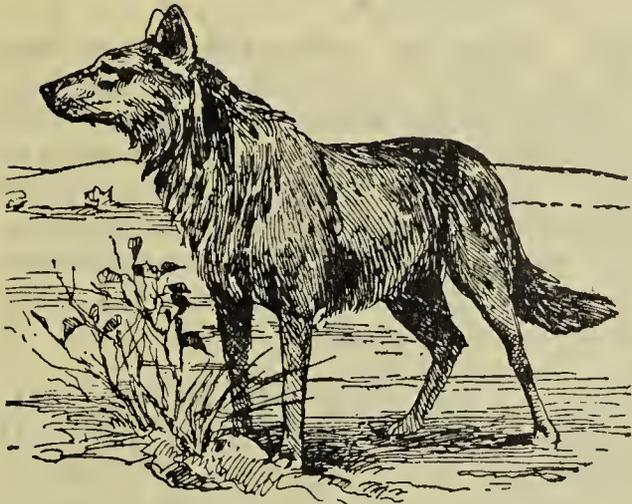


COYOTE PSYCHOLOGY

By Stuart J. Jordan, Saskatoon.



I HAD BEEN MAKING my way through a fruit orchard, which is located just three miles east of Saskatoon. Since the snow was protected it had not become crusted, making skiing slow and tiring.

I stopped to rest on one of the few hard packed drifts and surveyed the surrounding countryside. Two slinking shaggy forms were walking, as only coyotes can walk, across the middle of an open field. They were about half a mile away. They hadn't seen me. I dropped down behind a row of trees and approached them at a right angle. When I reached the end of the row they were still moving down the centre of the field. By this time I would say that they were about a hundred yards away from me.

Here follows a detailed account of their actions and I hope it interests the reader as much as the experience of watching their antics did me. The more I hear and see of these slouchy sleuths, the more convinced I am of their cunning.

The coyotes now approached a flock of partridge which I had flushed from the orchard and which were now feeding on the stubble and weed seeds. One coyote fanned out and by-passed the partridge and for some reason either stood or sat or lay down and watched the proceedings of his companion with interest. The bread-winning partner now set about his business. I expected him to stealthily approach the feeding birds, as might a cat, but instead he approached at a leisurely trot and passed through the centre of the group of birds as they flew off. They

landed a short distance away. He made no attempt to grab one and appeared to have little if any interest in them. You'd almost think he knew something about the psychological principle of conditioning. In other words, one could imagine his saying: "Get used to me being around—I'm a harmless critter—see. I'm not even interested in catching and eating such sweet birds as you are."

He lay down in a sort of nonchalant way and waited. My joints felt as if the wait lasted twenty minutes. I noticed the partridge were returning one by one to their old eating grounds. When they had all returned and the closest bird was within twenty to twenty-five feet I saw him slowly get up and stealthily creep forward toward the closest bird. The partridge let him get to within ten feet before they started to run away quite quickly. The coyote increased his pace but they had all taken wing before he had reached grabbing or pouncing range. This crafty fellow was not quite through however, for his ace card consisted of a tremendous spring into the air—it looked to be well over three feet—and a mighty snap of the jaws. In this case the jaws bit at air instead of plump partridge but I'm sure I'd witnessed a tried and tested technique, which has at least as many successes as failures.

I watched him for a few minutes more and he just stood still with his head down, feeling, I'm sure, disappointed and even hungry. They soon sped away along the fence rows like two fleeting shadows, forever pursued by hunger and fear.

I crossed their tracks many miles further on. It was nearing dusk. The sun's heat was waning. Coldness was creeping over the darkening snow. One partridge wouldn't have been missed. Somehow I couldn't help feeling sorry with him in his failure.

"Every creature is better alive than dead; men and moose and pine trees. And he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it." —Thoreau.