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## Community Wildlife Watch comes to Moraga

By Vera Kochan

Following a spate of coyote attacks within Moraga and Lafayette that took place for eight months, between July 2020 and March 2021, citizens had become increasingly vigilant in their attempts to help authorities capture the lone animal responsible for terrorizing the area. Although tests revealed that the captured coyote was not rabid, the entire experience was unnerving to residents.

In a March 17 Lamorinda Weekly article confirming the coyote's capture, Moraga Police Department Lt. Brian South stated, "We plan to continue working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to bring a wildlife awareness program to the community moving forward."

That time is now. Wildlife Watch began in Southern California, and according to South, Moraga is the first community slated to undertake the program in Northern California. Launched in 2015, its purpose is to reduce potential conflict regarding human-wildlife interactions that are increasingly on the rise in suburban areas.

Much like the Neighborhood Watch program, which it strives to emulate, Wildlife Watch was created to help communities cope with their issues involving wild animals encroaching into neighborhoods and wreaking havoc or harm, by providing training and support.

Most of the problem lies with human behavior. By providing a source of food in the form of outright feeding a wild animal with hand-outs, or inadvertently providing sustenance with unsecured garbage cans, pet food or by leaving pets outdoors as easy prey, coyotes and other wild animals remember where the last source of food was and return to the same general area for their next meal.

The Wildlife Watch website explains how the training works: "Empower people to respect wildlife through the understanding of ecology and conservation principles; increase awareness of local wildlife, and reduce complacency while promoting education at all levels; teach conservation and ecological principles based on facts not feelings, seeking first to understand and then be understood; encourage empathy and compassion for those affected by human-wildlife conflict (e.g., pet or livestock loss); value and respect each other's diverse views about how to manage human-wildlife conflicts; reduce public safety incidents, property damage, pet or livestock loss, and general nuisance reports involving wildlife; and develop effective partnerships through collaboration, coordination, and communication between the agencies entrusted to manage and protect our wildlife resources - and the communities they serve."

This type of "conservation coaching" will be provided to local agencies and community groups (whose volunteers are expected to choose "block captains" for their respective neighborhoods). Initially members of CDFW will conduct the training/coaching efforts with the expectation that eventually members of Lamorinda CERT will take over the role.

For more information visit: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Wildlife-Watch> or contact MPD Lt. Brian South at: [south@moraga.ca.us](mailto:south@moraga.ca.us) or call (925) 888-7052.

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