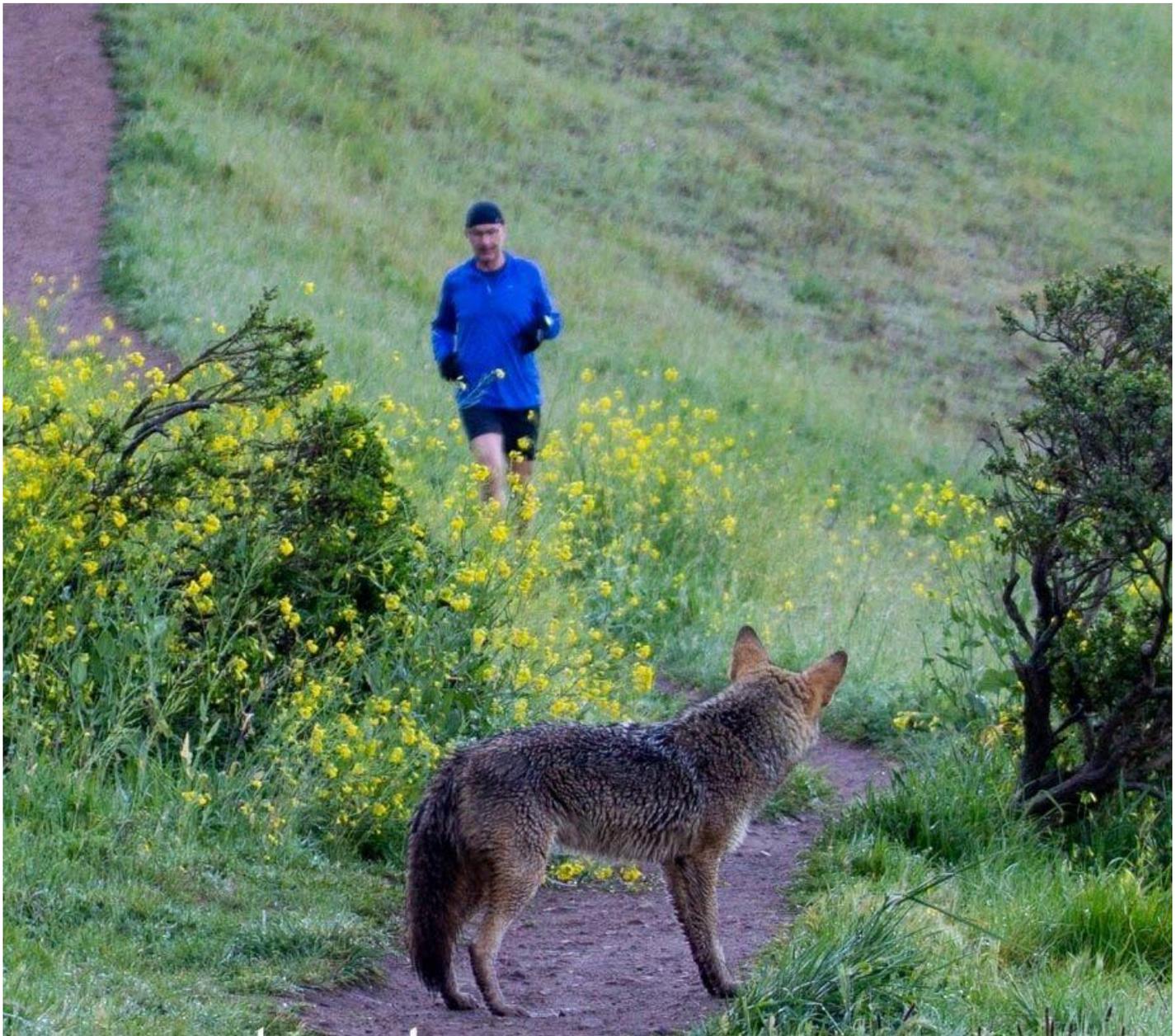


https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/the-city/keep-your-dogs-off-these-presidio-trails-for-coyote-season/article_0c2b054e-c35e-11ed-b724-b75092fb6991.html

SPOTLIGHT

Beware of the alpha: 2 popular Presidio trails closing to dogs

By Margaret Hetherwick | Examiner staff writer |
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A coyote stands on a trail in San Francisco, viewing a jogger.

Courtesy of Janet Kessler

Hide your kids and your French bulldogs. There's a new alpha canine in town.

The Presidio Land Trust announced that two of its most popular trails, the Bay Ridge Trail and the Park Trail, will be closed to dogs all spring and summer starting this week.

That doesn't mean the park will be devoid of canines. In fact, there's going to be quite a few more.

Coyote pupping season starts in late March, which means the normally elusive animals may become more aggressive to any perceived threats near their dens — which includes dogs. The trails will remain open to human hikers, but the park cautions people to avoid interacting with the wild animals.

Deb Campbell, a spokesperson for SF Animal Control, explained that when dogs approach den areas, coyotes push back.

“They will follow dogs, hunch their back, snarl — all things to encourage the dogs to move along,” Campbell told the Examiner. “This can be alarming to people. Best thing to do is avoid areas with known coyote dens and keep dogs on leash on walks.”

Golden Gate Park has had its share of close-call coyote encounters. In summer 2021, a male coyote named Carl began to threaten parkgoers by stalking small children, demonstrating zero fear of deterrents and boldly strolling through crowds of people.

Carl was euthanized by federal snipers that July — but he was the outlier.



A coyote pauses on a hillside overlooking the San Francisco skyline. Pupping season for the wild canines starts this month and continues through summer.

Courtesy of Janet Kessler

After a long absence in SF parks, coyotes mysteriously returned to the Presidio in 2002 after a pair crossed the Golden Gate Bridge from the Marin Headlands. While the population fluctuates, Animal Control estimates that there are around 100 resident coyotes in San Francisco alone, and the Presidio Land Trust has tracked a family of four coyotes in the park this season.

Janet Kessler, a local expert and diligent cartographer of San Francisco's coyote population, said the social dynamics of coyotes are more complex than meets the eye.

Coyotes mate for life, and only pairs defend a territory — young bachelors and bachelorettes are transient until they settle down with a companion. The alpha pair living in the Presidio, Wired and Puff, typically den down in the center of the park and rarely give humans any trouble, according to Kessler.

But in 2020, Sparks, a young male displaced from Glen Park, was spotted bowing in and out of territories in North Beach and Golden Gate Heights — but seemed to cautiously settle near the alpha pair in the Presidio. During breeding season of 2021, Puff chased Sparks out of the area several times, only for Sparks to slink back in after a few days.

The following year, Kessler observed Sparks acting like an alpha male — guarding the den and babysitting Wired and Puff's yearling pups. The young male has definitely joined the family, said Kessler, and will likely raise pups with Wired this spring.

Meet the Presidio Alpha Pair

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Sparks, the new alpha male coyote in the Presidio. Sparks is a three year old canine originally from Glen Park.

Courtesy of Janet Kessler

Kessler hopes that as wildlife interactions are on the rise, people choose to respect coyotes instead of reacting with fear.

“All we have to do is stay away from them. You see a coyote, you walk away from it. If you know a coyote is in a certain area, don’t go there. ... Coexistence is a matter of education.”

More Coverage

Read Sparks' full story here.

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