

A 'wolf' at the door?

You know, living out in the rural areas has its advantages, with the solitude, and the closeness to nature.

But there is a down side to that 'closeness' as well.

Almost every night, that silence is broken by howling, often waking me from a good night's sleep.

And it ain't The Sidekick howling—it's coyotes.

In spite of the fact experts tell me there are none in this area, I'm certain some are actually brush wolves, by their size alone.

The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has recently issued a release saying coyotes in the area have become increasingly brave, and are less and less intimidated by humans or dogs.

And I can believe it.

There was a time we'd hear coyotes at the back of the farm, yipping and howling while chasing a rabbit. Actually, I use to enjoy that solitary howling of a coyote. But that appeal is quickly diminishing.

They're so brazen. After a fresh snowfall, I find their tracks right around the farmhouse, and see evidence of them sniffing and pawing at the barn doors.

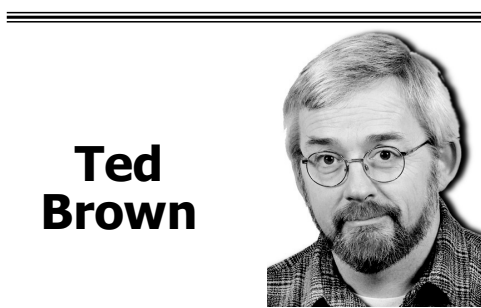
They are attracted to the sheep, and probably can hear or smell them inside the barn. But they've never been this close before.

Hamish, our border ollie, has moments when he growls as he's snoozing in the house with us. When The Sidekick and I walk him to the barn at night, we always make sure we keep our eyes open while making that trek.

Hamish does his bit, marking every tree between the house and the barn. Apparently male dog urine is one way of discouraging coyotes from coming too close to the buildings. They smell the presence of a dog and are wary of the area.

But I think Hamish would undergo total dehydration before he'd mark enough trees to keep these coyotes at bay.

At Brown Farm, we are fortunate. The sheep are housed inside, and the barn is secure, so the sheep and lambs



Ted Brown

are safe from them—for now.

But other farmers haven't been so lucky.

I've heard of coyotes taking down a beef calf or killing lambs with ease. Even farmers with guard animals (dogs, donkeys or llamas) have had losses from coyotes.

They're wily animals—part of the pack will distract the guard animals while another two or three attack from another angle.

Personally, we've only lost a few barn cats, so I can't complain too much. But I never let my guard down.

So what is the answer?

In town, the MNR suggests fencing back yards, keeping garbage in secure containers and not feeding or trying to tame a coyote.

Personally I don't see any of those suggestions as solutions. It's simply a politically correct way of commenting on a problem, with questionable results. Some northern Ontario municipalities take a harder line, offering bounties on wolves and coyotes to reduce their numbers.

Animal rights activists are quick to throw up their hands in horror, but I'm sure most of them have never seen a lamb or calf carcass which has been torn to bits by a pack of coyotes, not to mention considering the financial loss to the farmer.

So be forewarned. If you have a little dog or a house cat, keep a constant vigil when they go outside to do their 'business'.

'Cuz if you don't, chances are there might be a 'wolf' at your door, instead of your pet.



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