

NOTE

Distribution of coyotes in Florida.—A natural range extension by coyotes (*Canis latrans*) into the eastern United States has been well documented (Paradiso 1960, 1966, Richens and Hugie 1974, Taylor et al. 1976), and the presence of coyotes in Florida has been previously reported (Bailey 1933, Cunningham and Dunford 1970, Sherman 1937, Young and Jackson 1951:16). However, the existence of an established coyote population in Florida is known from the literature only in the Lake Wales area of Polk County (Cunningham and Dunford 1970, Layne 1974), and the current statewide status of the coyote has not been documented.

In recent years, the frequency and distribution of coyote records seemed to suggest the presence of a more substantial population than was indicated in the literature. Therefore, in 1981 a mail survey of 167 state, federal and university personnel was conducted to gather information about the statewide distribution of coyotes. Survey recipients were asked to indicate on a map the location of sightings, kills, or other evidence of coyote occurrence.

Sixty-nine individuals, representing all areas of the State, returned survey maps. Respondents reported 26 specimens, 4 sightings and 16 areas that yield frequent, reliable reports (Fig. 1). Although several respondents provided records from as early as the 1950's, no records prior to 1975 were used in the

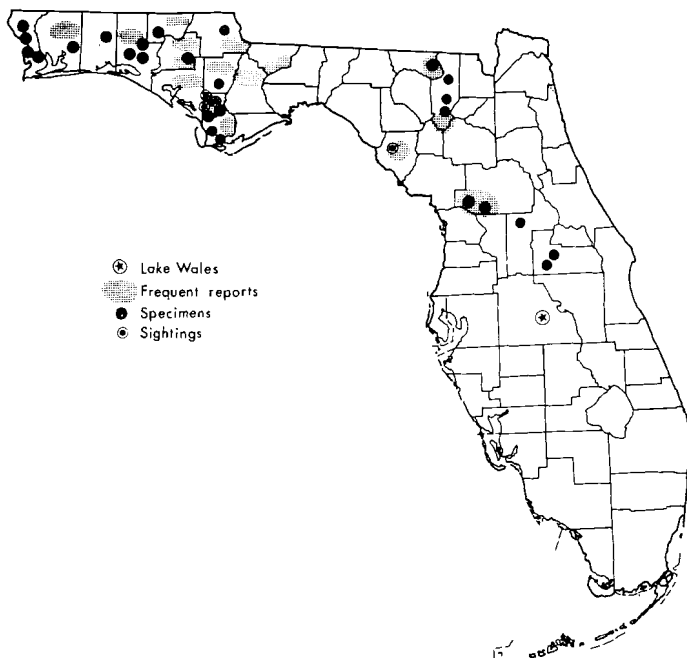


Fig. 1. Distribution of recent coyote records from Florida.

analysis. The composite map (Fig. 1) indicates a distribution of coyotes through much of the Florida Panhandle and along the Central Highland Ridge from Hamilton County to Polk County. Noteworthy is the absence of records from south Florida and the Lake Wales area of Polk County. Bailey (1933), Sherman (1937) and Young and Jackson (1951:16) reported coyote introductions in Palm Beach and DeSoto counties and coyotes killed in Collier and Monroe counties. Our findings, however, support Layne's (1974) doubts that coyotes currently occur in south Florida. Whether the absence of records from the Lake Wales area indicates a loss of coyotes there or simply an error in the survey method is not known.

Richens and Hugie (1974) characterize Eastern coyotes as being opportunistic feeders and as exhibiting a wide tolerance for habitat types. They associate the eastward movement of coyotes with a gradually changing habitat preference and conclude that there is no barrier to coyote range expansion except adequate food supplies. Therefore, assuming that coyotes are well established in northern Florida, the eventual occupation of the entire State seems inevitable.

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¹Deceased