Coydogs becoming menace in some areas of state

A 49-pound male coydog was captured by trappers in Vermilion Parish after residents complained that the animal was killing cattle.

A group of hunters was startled in the early morning hours by the howl of coyotes outside their camp in Vermilion Parish.

The pack of animals encircled the cabin and was howling at the hunting dog inside with the men.

What sounded like a coyote turned out to be a new breed of animal that is becoming a menace in some areas of the state. The coydog is a cross between a domestic dog and a coyote, and it is creating a scare among some residents.

"It is spooky to be awakened by that sound," said hunter Ed Vice, who owns 650 acres in Boston, in Vermilion Parish. "These animals are not afraid of man, and they will come uncomfortably close" to where people are.

Vice said he was putting out duck decoys at his camp early one one morning last fall when he was chased by a pack of about 12 coydogs.

"I wasn't going to stand around to see what they wanted," he said.

Trappers in southern Louisiana said the animals are a problem, and the state Agriculture and Forestry Department said complaints about coydogs topped 150 last year.

"They're pretty bad," said Cler Suire of Crowley, who has trapped animals for the past seven years. "These animals will kill just to kill. They are very abundant everywhere I go."

Trapper Robert Hancock of Watson said one woman in Houma saw a coydog attack and kill her pet Chihuahua.

"I get lots of complaints about them things killing pet dogs and cats," he said. Pet owners aren't the only ones complaining. Farmers have seen the coydogs killing their livestock, and the target tends to be newly born calves, one farmer said.

"Man, I'll tell you, they are really big," said farmer Roland Viator whose cattle graze on 300 acres near Henry, La. "The ones I saw must have weighed about 75 pounds. They look kinda like a Labrador."

The problem, the agriculture department says, is that, while coyotes tend to be a shy animal and stay in secluded wooded settings, the coydog is at home in the city and not afraid to approach people. Coydogs are much larger than the average 35-pound coyote. Coydogs weighing more than 100 pounds have been trapped, the agriculture department said.

"A coyote kills to survive, but these animals will kill 20 sheep or cattle at a time, even when they're not hungry," Suire said of the coydog.

One resident in Lafayette Parish, near Evangeline Downs, saw a coydog tearing up his trash, Suire said.

Hancock, who traps animals mainly in the Florida parishes, said a coydog will eat just about anything. They've been known to tear up people's gardens, eating the entire vegetation in one night, he said.

"They will go up in your carport and kill your dog and eat the dog food," Suire said. "Some even live in residential areas."

Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Bob Odom said the coydog complaints, which have been recorded since 1984, are escalating as suburban population centers expand into rural areas and more domestic dogs are discarded by their owners.

The department investigates coydog complaints after citizens call the Animal Damage Control section, which was transferred from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 1990.

"The answer is simple on what to do with these animals," said Suire. "People should bring their dogs inside at night, if they don't want 'em. I tell them not to drop their dogs off in the woods, because it will cause more problems than we've already got."