GRAY WOLVES IN IOWA

Since 2014 four hunters, that we know of, have killed wild gray wolves¹ in Iowa – in Buchanan, Jones, Van Buren, and Osceola counties.² The hunters claimed that they thought that they were shooting a coyote instead of a wolf. None of the hunters have been charged with violating the law that makes killing wolves illegal. Wolves were extirpated from Iowa in 1955.³

Under state law, gray wolves are classified as a furbearer; the hunting season for the gray wolf is closed which makes killing a wolf illegal unless the wolf is harming livestock. Since the gray wolf is on the federal threatened and endangered species lists for the upper half of Iowa, federal law protects wolves living in the upper half of Iowa from being hunted.⁴

Wolves are noticeably larger in size than coyotes, with adult wolves weighing between 50 to 100 pounds while coyotes weigh between 35 and 40 pounds. Wolves are five to six feet long while coyotes are three and a half to four and a half feet long. Wolves stand 27 to 33 inches at the shoulder while coyotes are 20 to 22 inches tall at the shoulder.⁵

By now hunters should be aware that wolves have begun to repopulate the state and there should be no excuse to kill a wolf and claim that it is a coyote.

Policy Recommendations

Hunter education. Given that wild wolves have started repopulating Iowa, it is time for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to embark on an aggressive hunter education program. That program should involve teaching hunters how to identify a wolf, explaining that it is illegal to kill a wolf in Iowa, and encouraging hunters to make a careful identification before they pull the trigger.

1 Gray wolves are also called timber wolves.
2 Orlan Love, “No charges in shooting of 2 wolves”, Cedar Rapids Gazette, March 5, 2016
3 Orlan Love, “Time to consider Iowa as bear habitat?”, Cedar Rapids Gazette, August 7, 2014
4 Orlan Love, “Gray wolf returns to protected list”, Cedar Rapids Gazette, February 23, 2015
5 Orlan Love, “No charges in shooting of 2 wolves”, Cedar Rapids Gazette, March 5, 2016
Description of wolves and coyotes in hunter regulation booklet. Every year the DNR publishes a booklet of hunting and trapping regulations. That booklet should have a section that describes the physical differences between wolves and coyotes, along with photographs demonstrating the differences.

Enforcement of laws against killing wolves. Additionally the Iowa Chapter encourages the DNR to begin enforcing the law banning hunting of wolves and to aggressively prosecute any hunter who kills a wolf.

What you can do

You can write to the Fish and Wildlife Service and ask that they conduct an investigation into the shooting of the four wolves, with an eye to penalizing the hunters who killed the wolves, an animal protected by the federal endangered species act. The address of the Fish and Wildlife Service is

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rock Island Field Office
1511 47th Ave.
Moline, IL 61265

Write to the Natural Resources Commission and ask that the Department of Natural Resources begin enforcing the law with respect to the killing of wolves, which are protected by a closed season. Also ask that the DNR update its hunting and trapping regulation booklet to show hunters the differences between wolves and coyotes, and finally ask that the DNR undertake an outreach program to inform hunters that it is illegal to kill a wolf in Iowa. The address of the Natural Resources Commission is

Natural Resources Commission
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
502 E 9th St
Des Moines, IA 50319