

Why are coyotes so polarizing?

By Lawrence Lenhart, High Country News

First things first: Coyote. When you read the word, how many syllables do you hear? Your answer, according to Dan Flores, author of “Coyote America,” may be “immediately diagnostic of a whole range of belief systems and values.”

The *ki-YOH-tee* versus *ki-yote* divide is one of the best indicators of a person’s coyote politics, a nearly hard-and-fast way that we subconsciously identify ourselves: as defenders of the species, in the case of the former, or as a manager, shooter and/or trapper, in the latter.

In “Coyote America,” Flores occasionally assumes the mantle of coyote’s head of public relations, demonstrating how the species, once “dead last in public appeal – behind rattlesnakes, skunks, vultures, rats, and cockroaches,” overcame its stigma as “varmint” to become a darling among the very people who most infrequently encounter it – modern-day urbanites. More often, though, Flores is content to serve as a guide to the species, relaying the coyote’s complicated natural, cultural, political and mythological histories. It is why Flores describes his book as, “in most respects, a coyote biography.”

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