



WILDLIFE NOTES

White-nosed Coati

Of the carnivore family Procyonidae, Arizona, Texas and New Mexico are the only states lucky enough to have all three species that occur in North America; the raccoon, the ringtail, and the white-nosed coati (*Nasua narica*), sometimes called the coatimundi. All have five-toes, are plantigrade (meaning that they walk on the soles of their feet, like bears and humans do), and have a series of dark rings around their tails. Coatis weigh from 8-16 pounds. They have a white muzzle, a long upturned nose, heavy foreclaws for digging, and a long ringed tail. Many people think that the tail is prehensile, like monkeys, but it is not. Also, whereas the raccoon and the ringtail are primarily solitary and active only at night (nocturnal), the coati is mostly active during the day (diurnal) and is very social.

There are 4 species of coatis, all found in the New World; white-nosed, brown-nosed, the mountain coati, and one found only on San Cozumel Island. The white-nosed coati is the only one that makes it up to the United States.

In New Mexico, most coatis live in the mountain areas of the southwestern corner of the state, in Hidalgo, Grant, Catron and Luna counties. There have been sightings reported from as far

north as Quemado and as far east as Ruidoso! Coatis don't hibernate and can't survive in areas that receive too much snow. Coatis usually inhabit areas from 4500-7500 feet in elevation. They like steep, rocky canyons and riparian areas.

Coatis live in groups, called bands or troops. These can number from three to over twenty animals! Troops usually consist of adult females, most of which are related, and their young. These troops split up in early summer, when the females are about to give birth, usually to 2-6 young. When the young are about 2-3 weeks old, the troops reunite.

Troops maintain a loose territory, which usually overlaps with one or more other troops. When two troops meet, there is much sniffing, grunting and squealing as they greet each other. Sometimes, coatis from one troop will leave with the other one!

Males leave the troop when they reach adulthood, at two years of age. They remain solitary and are only tolerated in troops during



the brief mating season, in early spring. Only one male is allowed in a troop, and when another male comes around, they can fight each other ferociously.

Coatis sleep in rocky crevices high in the mountains, or sometimes they make a stick and branch nest in a cottonwood or sycamore along a stream. They come down in the morning to forage for food. Coatis are omnivores. They eat the fruits of junipers, cactus, manzanita, oaks, and many other plants. An adult may climb into a tree and shake the branches, while the rest of the troop remains on the ground and eats the falling fruit. They also dig through leaf litter hunting for arthropods. Coatis will "roll" tarantulas back and forth on the ground with their forepaws to remove all the irritating hairs before eating them. Occasionally, coatis will also catch lizards,

snakes, or rodents, but they are not very good hunters.

If you are lucky, you can hear a troop of coatis as they forage through the leaf litter. They make lots of noise digging, and will frequently make squeals, chirps and grunts to each other. Coatis hold their tails up in the air as they move about. After a troop has foraged in an area, it may look like the ground was rototilled! This digging in the leaf litter helps to recycle nutrients into the soil. Seeing a troop of coatis course through the forest or sunbathe on top of a large boulder is an awesome sight.

When threatened or startled, coatis run to the nearest trees. The adults may attempt to frighten off intruders by swishing their tails and grunting. In New Mexico, mountain lions and raptors (eagles and hawks) are the coati's main predators, although black bears can sometimes catch young or pregnant individuals. They usually run from dogs, but can put up a good fight if cornered or surprised.

Currently in New Mexico, coatis may be expanding their range. The biggest threat to them is destruction of suitable habitat. The higher numbers and diversity

of fruiting plants and arthropods along riparian areas are important food sources for them. Through habitat conservation and public awareness, we can ensure that the coati will continue to thrive in our beautiful state.

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