

# Hunter Education and Red Wolf Restoration

by David Denton

North Carolina has a long heritage of hunting, and in the state's more rural areas, it's a way of life. Of the many species hunted in North Carolina, the coyote is becoming a favorite among sportsmen because of the challenge of hunting a top predator. A few sportsmen now hunt specifically for these wily critters. But by far, most of the coyotes harvested in the state are taken as an incidental prize while hunting another species.

In North Carolina, coyotes are considered a "nuisance" animal, along with beavers, groundhogs, nutria and skunks. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) allows year-round hunting for these species with few to no restrictions.

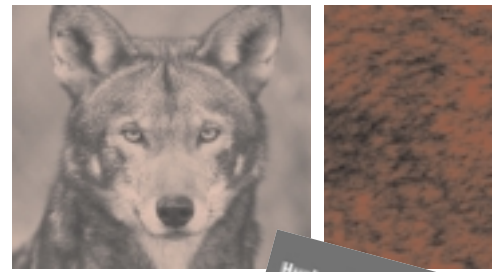
Since a large southeastern coyote weighs up to 40 pounds, a positive identification between a coyote and a red wolf, especially a young wolf, can be difficult. Even trappers with an animal in hand sometimes have trouble telling the difference.

As coyote populations continue to increase, so will the numbers of

sportsmen looking to harvest this non-native and highly adaptive animal. With more sportsmen hunting coyotes in areas the endangered red wolf now inhabits, the problem of identification will increase. Thus, wildlife managers must come up with solutions.

Hunter education is a good place to start. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the NCWRC along with Defenders of Wildlife and the Red Wolf Coalition worked cooperatively to create red wolf pocket ID cards. These laminated cards show and explain the physical differences between the red wolf and the coyote and include a map of the current range of the red wolf in the five northeastern counties of the state. This colorful and informative pocket pamphlet has helped educate the public about the expanding range of the red wolf as the wild population increases.

With the distribution of the cards through the NCWRC's Hunter Education Program, wildlife managers are reaching out to outdoorsmen and raising awareness about the impor-



tance of making a positive ID in the field. The ID cards are given to all who attend a hunter education class in the northeastern part of the state and are available wherever hunting licenses are sold. With NCWRC officers and volunteer instructors teaching about the importance of all species, sportsmen will gain a deeper respect for the broader aspects of wildlife management.

Eastern North Carolina has seen many changes in the past 20 years. With new roads, highways and subdivisions being built for the ever-increasing human population that is spreading into rural areas, educating the public about red wolves will be a major challenge. The pocket ID cards along with the materials and information in hunter education classes will help both the hunting and non-hunting public to protect the red wolf. ■

*David Denton is a Hunter Education Specialist with the North Carolina Wildlife Enforcement Division, where he has worked since 1984 with wildlife management, research and education.*

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