



BY ELIZABETH SCHLEICHERT
PHOTOS BY TOM AND PAT LEESON

On a rugged hillside in the Rocky Mountains, three *coyote* pups crawl cautiously out of their den (see photo at **left**). They pause for a minute as one seems to whisper to another, “Race you down to the meadow!” Then in a flash, all three pups tumble down the hill.

After a few hours of romping, the tired pups settle down to relax with Mom and their other littermates (**below**). Some gently nuzzle her, while others roll lazily in the grass. With nine babies altogether, Mom sure has her paws full, especially around dinnertime!

COYOTE FACTS

FAMILY: Like wolves and foxes, the coyote is a kind of dog. Its scientific name, *Canis latrans*, means “barking dog.”

PACKS: A coyote lives in a pack—made up of a mated pair and their pups, and sometimes other grown family members.

SIZE: About as big as a German shepherd.

WHERE FOUND: Throughout North America, even in cities and suburbs. Digs dens under rocks, hollow trees, or in hillsides. Sometimes lives in abandoned groundhog or badger dens.

What’s on today’s menu for this coyote family?



COYOTE TAKE-OUT



FUN FACTS

CLEVER: Many Native American stories describe the coyote as a sly trickster. And this animal has true smarts. For example, a coyote often scans the skies looking for flocks of ravens or crows circling overhead—a sign that a dead animal lies below. When it sees the birds hovering, the coyote knows to head over in that direction for a free meal.

FAST AND FIT: A coyote can run at speeds of nearly 40 miles an hour. It can cover 400 miles in one journey.



GONE FISHIN'!

When Mom gets hungry, she leaves her pups and heads out to grab a bite. Like all coyotes, she's hardly a picky eater. Practically anything will do, from mice and squirrels to melons, lizards, grasshoppers—even skunks and dead animals. This ability to eat a variety of foods has helped coyotes live in all kinds of habitats.

Fish is the catch of the day for Mom. It didn't take her long to pounce and grab the trout from a nearby stream! **(left)** On this single expedition, she snags five big fish! She eats her fill, then trots back to the den to feed her pups.

SUMMER PICNIC

As soon as Mom returns, the hungry pups eagerly crowd around her. Some don't waste a minute and immediately push and shove their way close to her and start to nurse.

But others are after something else. For them, Mom opens her mouth wide, and—*urp*—up comes fresh fish for everyone (**below**). Seems gross, huh? Not to the pups, though! They can't chew very well yet. So Mom is serving them her own kind of soft "baby" food. (Sometimes other grown pack members also help out by feeding the pups in this way.)

In a week or two, Mom will start bringing her pups live mice so they can begin practicing their own hunting skills. The youngsters will also practice by chasing after grasshoppers on their own. And before long, the little ones will go off on hunting expeditions with Mom or another adult pack member and watch and learn even more.



TIME OUT

For now, nobody is going anywhere. Mom curls up for a nap (**left**), and so do some of the pups, such as the tired-out one **below**. Others are eager to follow their noses and track down some new, exciting smells.

And so this fine summer day winds down to a peaceful end. Who knows what new adventures tomorrow will bring? 🐾

