

The two coyotes I saw today were very golden colored. Do coyotes' coat colors change by the seasons?

Let me start by saying I was delighted to find this question this morning. Not because I am particularly delighted by coyotes; but, it is Ask a Ranger question number 100! So thank you very much for asking...

I have done some reading and net surfing checking on coyote fur color. I have been unable to come up with a perfect answer; in any case here goes:

As far as I can tell, a given coyotes' fur color does not change a great deal over the course of its life, let alone over the course of a season or two. Presumably, based on all the dogs that I have met over the years, as a coyote ages it will get grayer (hard to tell on an animal that starts out predominantly gray).

Coyotes have been described as being gray to brown and even "tawny" there are even some instances of black coyotes. Since tawny is defined by dictionary.com as "of a dark yellowish or dull yellowish-brown color" golden colored coyotes are certainly a possibility.

I have seen coyotes in this area from gray to tan to dark brown to reddish. Most commonly they are gray to dark gray with reddish-brown high lights. Coyotes that live in dessert areas tend to be yellower in color, coyotes living in mountainous areas tend to be darker in color.

Another aspect of coloration, or at least the perception of color, is the light. At different times of the day, different seasons of the year and due to various climatic conditions, the quality of light is different. When the sun is lower in the sky it is often "redder"; if you saw the coyotes when the sun was low, or when something else had changed the apparent color of sunlight, the coyotes may have appeared to be more golden than on some other day.

Coyotes are also capable of mating with domestic dogs. A coyote that mated with a yellow dog (a Golden Retriever for instance) might very well have off spring that were more golden in color.