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ENVIRONMENT

Park Service Wraps Up Two-Year Effort to Better Understand Coyote Scat

- **Volunteers worked on study to dissect coyote scat**
- **Goal was to understand what coyotes eat in urban environments**
- **Study brought different people together in name of science**

“And I asked what was going on and they said they were dissecting coyote scat,” he remembers. “And I was like, ‘wow, that sounds really cool.’”

Let’s just call it what it is, folks. We’re talking about poop. Specifically, coyote poop. Which the [National Park](#) Service has been studying for two years.

“We’ve dissected over 3,000 scats at this point,” says ecologist Justin Brown.

The goal of the study is to get a clear picture of what coyotes are eating in different urban environments in order to better understand and manage the population.

Here’s how it works. Volunteers collect the scats and bring them to the National Park Service.

“We would take them and bake them, throw them through a wash machine and run them through a dryer,” Brown explains, “so that they’re basically not really scat anymore.”

What’s left is so clean, people can pick through it with their bare hands. Some even eat [breakfast](#), right next to a pile of...well, you get the idea.

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So who would volunteer to spend their Saturdays like this? Tony Roselli, for one. He's a dedicated citizen scientist who has been with the project from the very beginning. Looking over a new specimen, he's excited by what he finds.

“You’ve got all these different bones and claws and teeth,” says Roselli.

He's enjoyed this project for a few reasons. Number one, he met some new and interesting people and number two, he loves the science of it all.

It's going to take time to digest all the data, but they have noticed a few trends so far. Downtown coyotes eat far more leftover human and pet food than their cousins in Thousand Oaks. Suburban coyotes eat more rabbits. In the city, more domestic cats.

And that's what Green finds so interesting about the process.

"You know, each time it's a little different," he explains. "Last time I got like a big pile of fur. It was a ground squirrel."

Sadly all things must pass. This weekend marked the final day of the study. One volunteer, Kat Halsey, even made up little plaques that said Golden Scat Award -- a unique reminder of the time they spent learning about coyotes inside and out.

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