



# PREDATOR TACTICS



## CATCHING AND CALLING FOXES, BOBCATS AND COYOTES

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# Pinpointing Coyotes

After you find a great area for a set you must still locate the best places to set your traps

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
**MIKE SCHOONVELD**

**H**ow many articles on coyote trapping have you read that stress the key to success is finding the right location? Dozens, I'm sure. I've written them myself. They describe the sorts of places to "look for" on the land you have available to trap.

Every coyote trapper deals with travel lanes, terrain features, crop patterns, highways, creeks, outcrops and a near endless list of everyday features that affect where a coyote is likely to roam. And that dictates the locations you have available to make your sets. But if you want to achieve the most success, there's more to it than just finding a place where coyotes are likely to pass by.

## Pinpointing Location

A good friend of mine runs a charter fishing boat on Lake Michigan for yellow perch. He doesn't fish for salmon, smallmouth bass, steelhead or any of the other species of fish in the lake — just perch. And he's good at it. When everyone is catching perch, he's going for the biggest ones. When no one is catching anything, count on Chuck to come in with near limits anyway.

The thing is, Chuck knows about spots no bigger than a car, miles offshore, where little holes in the lake bottom occur naturally and always hold a few fish. He finds the hole with his GPS, but it doesn't end there.

"Sometimes you have to fish by the front bumper

and other days you have to drop in by the tail lights," Capt. Chuck says.

He's doing what professional fishermen call fishing the "spot on the spot."

This isn't a fishing story, however. It's an article to teach you a similar concept applied to trapping.

Once you've located a great location to put in a set for coyotes, is there a "spot on the spot" that will make the great location even better? There certainly is.

## Learn by Experience

One of the perennial "best spots" on my trapline is a location where a grass covered field lane leads from a large CRP field (on which I do not have permission to trap) to another, smaller CRP acreage on which I do have permission. There's a shallow, weed-filled ditch along the edge of the road.

The whole setup screams "coyotes live here."

The land I don't have permission to trap is across a county road so setting up near the end of the lane would put any captured coyotes in plain sight of passers-by. Obviously, setting up on the end of the road nearer the smaller tract of habitat, a half-mile off the paved road is a better option. It's the prime "location," but is there more to know?

At different times, I've made sets in the crop field adjacent to the lane, in the lane, up tight to the taller weeds along the drainage ditch and at the edge of the CRP grasses. I've pinned the occasional coyote in traps set in the roadway, but sets made tight to the

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tall weeds or grasses have proven worthless.

Meanwhile, I've snapped dozens of coyotes in sets I installed in the corner of the crop field.

That's the spot on the spot — learned by experience.

### Immediate Gratification

As good of a teacher as experience is, it's much more gratifying to be able to pick the spot on the spot immediately without seasons of experimentation. To do this regularly, several factors will need to be considered before plunking down the steel.

First, look over the landscape and determine where you expect the coyotes to be coming from or going to and then zero in closer.

What's the exact path they'll take? Will they be on a lane, along the edge of a field, following a fence line? Within a couple of feet, what's the exact location of their path?

Finding tracks or droppings will help you zero in on that exact trail, but many areas don't reveal much sign and most sign weathers away quickly. Don't pass up a likely location because of lack of sign, but use the presence of tracks or droppings as a great learning tool.

If you do find tracks in the soil proving a coyote has passed that way, where would have been the best place to have made a set that would have been hard for the coyote to ignore?

Play this game over and over and you'll be well on the way to identifying the exact places to dig your trap beds regardless of the presence or absence of sign.

### Other Factors

But you have to take it a step farther. What is the weather expected to do for the next few days? Is rain predicted? Will the wind blow from a particular direction in the near term? What is the prevailing wind direction in your area?

What is the crop in the field? Corn, soybeans or alfalfa? And has it been harvested or still standing? Does the landowner or other people commonly pass this way or is it an area you basically have to yourself? Do you expect any fall tillage to occur?

All of these need to be considered to select the perfect location for your trap. There's nothing more frustrating than showing up at a trap site to

find the whole set drowned under a few inches of water. A trap positioned just 10 feet away might still be high, dry and even more productive since a coyote will likely circle a puddle rather than wade through it.

There's little that's more maddening than driving to a trap site and finding your trap smashed flat by a farm truck or fertilizer spreader — or missing entirely after being plowed away by a chisel plow.

During trapping season, I check the weather constantly and always pay attention to the predicted wind directions. The prevailing winds in my area come from the west. It's either southwest, due west or northwest about two-thirds of the time. The other third might feature a breeze from any quadrant.

One might reason the best strategy would be to make all the sets to take advantage of a somewhat westerly breeze. That's certainly a strategy to consider, especially for traps set in locations where you know they are going to be in place for a week or longer, but what if the weatherman has predicted a north or east wind for the next few days?

I make a lot of catches in the first night or two or three of setting a trap. In fact, I'm disappointed if I install a trap in a location and it doesn't score almost immediately. If I only set for the prevailing westerlies, in spite of winds predicted from some other direction of the compass in the near term, I'd be handicapping my first few nights.

Coyotes will invariably work a set facing into the wind and with the prevailing westerlies in my area it feels weird making a dirt hole set with the trap somewhere other than on the east side of the hole. But if the weatherman says east winds for the next few days, I'll set for the east winds.

When the wind predictions change, I'll remake the set to take advantage of the new forecast or punch in another set nearby to take advantage of the wind change.

Varying wind directions is one of the best reasons to follow the long touted maxim: "Any spot worthy of setting one trap is worth setting two." Some follow that rule with the hopes of catching doubles. I follow that rule to ensure I catch every lone coyote that passes by and if I manage a double, it's a bonus.

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### Travel Routes

Trappers can capitalize on coyotes' traveling instinct by locating areas where travel routes intersect.

### Coyotes' Range

Coyotes are travelers. They evolved in the plains and deserts of North America where their next meal or the next place they might even hope for a meal could be miles away. Now that they've moved east of the Mississippi, they haven't lost that traveling instinct.

There's little doubt there's enough mice, rabbits and other prey in an 80-acre CRP field to keep a family of coyotes fat and sassy. There's also little doubt no coyotes would ever be content living their lives in such a small area. They are going to travel.

Most experts peg the home range of an individual coyote in farm country at about 10 square miles. That's 64,000 acres. And chances are the range isn't going to be a perfectly square or circular area. It's much more likely, due to highways, rivers or other terrain features, to be 15 or more miles from one farthest extreme to the other.

Capitalizing on the coyotes' traveling instinct is how I choose most of my prime locations. I try to look at the landscape and imagine if I were a coyote bent on getting from one side of the area to the other, where would I be most likely to go? Then I

look for areas where travel routes intersect or where travel routes converge because of natural factors.

Miles mean little to a coyote. Ease of travel means a lot. In my area, drainage ditches are a major part of the landscape. They'll follow small drainage ditches leading in the direction in which they are traveling, but, more importantly, they'll travel a half mile out of their way to cross at a culvert crossing rather than go down the steep bank, jump or swim across the waterway and up the other side. The culvert crossing, which was put there as a bridge for farm trucks and tractors, is a natural funnel area and a logical "good location" for a trap — or set of traps.

### Crossings

So you've located a prime crossing on your line. Where do you place the trap or traps? What's the spot on the spot?

One might think setting a trap right on the crossing, halfway across the drain or stream would be hard to beat. It's not. First, placing a trap right on the crossing is an invitation

to have your trap run over by a big green machine, not to mention it's usually far easier to make a set in the crop residue on either side of the crossing than in the packed down roadway.

At the minimum, I'll place one set on each side of the crossing. Usually, I'll install a big, showy set far enough out from the crossing to be out of the way of farm equipment, but close and large enough that any coyote traversing the crossing is going to notice the pile of chaff and dirt I rake up as backing for the set. I keep the wind in mind, of course, but I want the coyote to spot the set visually even if it's traveling with the breeze.

At some locations (usually ones with a proven history as a hotspot from previous trapping seasons), I will position up to four sets at a culvert crossing. A big, showy set a coyote is bound to notice goes on each side, along with another set made to take advantage of the prevailing wind or the wind direction predicted for the next several days.

All crossings aren't created equal. Some are perennial hot spots and some might be good one year and so-so at best the next. A few clean up on

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coyotes on one side and seldom catch a song dog on the other. When I figure out exactly why, I'll write another article about it. In the meantime, I'll keep setting these locations with traps positioned exactly where I consider the best spot on the spot.

### Simple Rules

Finding the best general locations on your line is important; finding the "spot on the spot" is vital. There are a few rules of thumb I follow religiously.

Don't crowd the coyote. A good location is anywhere you can make multiple catches in one season. A great location is a good location that produces every year. I have many great locations on my trapline. With time, setting those great locations has been terrific on-the-job training.

I can't count the number of times I've made a pair of sets in locations to make sure a traveling coyote would get a whiff of the bait and lure I use regardless of the wind direction. I'd often place one of the sets is out in the open, say 25 feet or so from the nearest cover, and then tuck the other set tight to the ditch bank, fence line or other feature. No more. I can count the times the set up tight to the cover scored. Darned few.

Now I look for an area that plays the wind, but where the natural travel way allows me to put a set 10 feet or more from heavy cover. Now I have the spot on the spot covered.

Keep it simple. A good set in a great spot will pay off. A poor set in a great spot will also pay off. So don't worry so much about making great sets as much as finding the perfect locations to make the sets. Likewise, don't constantly experiment with a large variety of lures and/or baits. I certainly have used a tiny fraction of the concoctions available to trappers. I'm sure some are better than others. However, I'd give better odds to a trapper using a poor lure in a great location than to one using a lure I consider one of the best in a poor location. Pick a lure or two from a reputable lure maker and then continue refining your ability to use them in the perfect locations.

Be sure to revisit early season hotspots. Every



### Great Location

Making a great set is not as important as making your set in a great location. Even a poorly made set in a great location will produce some catches.

good coyote trapper will have a few spots on their line where they snag three, four, maybe a half dozen coyotes in a short time before the spot suddenly goes dead. Perhaps all the available coyotes were either caught or smartened up enough to avoid being caught.

Come back to those areas three weeks or a month later and count on making a few more quick catches. Either the residents have been replaced or the smart ones forgot their lessons.

Either way, the spot on the spot is likely to score again. It's much like fishing in that regard. As long as you are on the very best spot, there will always be something lurking.

*Mike Schoonveld is a veteran trapper from Morocco, Ind.*





# What a Breeze

Slow hunt turns memorable with Colorado 'cat

STORY AND PHOTOS BY

**JARED BLOHM**

**A**s Steve Criner pulled his truck out of the driveway, the sun peaked over the mountains on the horizon. Yesterday's snow had mostly melted and the temperature was already close to 20 degrees warmer than our first morning on the ranch.

If it wasn't for the gusting winds, which had started in the late afternoon the day before, it would have been a perfect morning for coyote calling. Instead, with breezes that cut through all the layers I could muster, Criner, a Hunter's Specialties Pro Staffer, had an idea.

"How 'bout we go kill a bobcat?" he said over the rumble of the washboard road.

Sounded good to me.

## Putting in the Time

It was the third morning of our hunt on the beautiful Menegatti ranch south of Pueblo, Colo. I had hunted the first day with Criner and the second day with Al Morris, another Hunter's Specialties Pro Staffer. Both callers knew the area well from hunting it in past years, but the first two days had been mostly unproductive. The trucks I rode back to camp on only contributed one coyote to the group's total. We hunted hard — about 15 stands a day — but I hadn't had a chance to fire my rifle yet.

"I always say the most important thing in predator hunting is putting in the time," an aggravated Morris had said at the end of Day 2. "And we've put in the time."

Morris isn't accustomed to many dry spells. Only a couple months earlier, he teamed up with Garvin Young — who was also on the Colorado trip — for

their second straight World Coyote Calling Championship (WCCC) title. They are the only team to win the event back-to-back. Plus, they also won in 1997, making them the only duo to win it three times. Criner is no slouch either. He came in seventh with his partner, Clay Owens, in last year's WCCC, the first he entered.

Criner and I were now headed to the canyons, where we could try to escape the wind and hit a bobcat hotspot. Morris had shot a bobcat there last year and Gerald Stewart — a Hunter's Specialties Pro Staffer and the son of Johnny Stewart, the famed founder of Johnny Stewart Game Calls — called one in at close range on video there last year, only to let it walk. He did not know Colorado laws had changed and bobcats were legal to shoot.

"I just think those 'cats congregate there because they're making a living," Morris said. "The food source is there for them. They don't get harassed. They must have a lot of good escape cover from the coyotes or anything that would harass a bobcat."

We had saved the area for when the wind was right, but now, even with the winds swirling, we decided to give it a shot because it was the last day of the hunt.

## Keys to Success

There are two areas that Criner and Morris stress can make or break any stand — scent control and approach.

Both hunters go through a strict scent elimination system with Scent-A-Way products. They also wear Scent Wafers in the field to help cover their odor. Morris said the key is to follow every step. The system is not nearly as effective if all of the steps are not taken.

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"I doubt anything is 100 percent effective, but if it let's you get another 5, 10, 15 seconds on a coyote that gets downwind of you and he doesn't blow out, he's not sure what he smelled, that advantage is huge and I'll take any advantage over that coyote," Morris said.

Approach is equally as important.

"If they see a vehicle out there, they know to stay away from it," Morris said. "So, if you approach a stand, ideally you can hide your pickup over a hill or down in a dip, an embankment, anything that will hide it, and then you've got to sneak out of the truck."

Criner and I parked about a half-mile from our setup. We stayed along tree edges and in low points on the walk in, trying to be as invisible as possible. My camouflage pattern — Outfitter Camo from Cabelas — was designed for Western terrain. We also limited our sound as much as possible.

"Don't slam the doors. Don't make noise. Don't bang your gun. Don't bang your caller. Don't bang your seat," Morris advised. "Sneak into your stand and approach it from an angle or a position that's not going to skyline yourself. Sneak in there and sit down as quietly as you can and then start your stand."

### The Right Location

The best part of any setup, Criner said, is a known population. And since we knew there were 'cats nearby from the encounters Morris and Stewart had, Criner was confident in the first spot he chose to call.

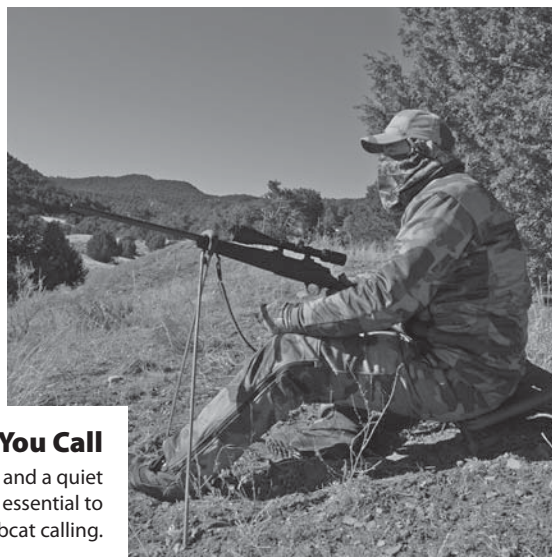
"It's a nice canyon with three fingers coming into it, lots of cedars, lots of rocks, real 'catty terrain," Criner said. "All that mixed with the 'cat tracks we've cut in the past, I know it will be a pretty good setup."

We set up on a rock bank looking into an open area between a rocky slope covered with trees and a hill sloping down. Criner set a PreyMaster Wireless Game Caller about 40 yards from us. If a bobcat came in to the call, the shot would be less than 75 yards.

"With it being windy, the sounds don't get as far, especially in these canyons, the way the wind swirls," Criner said. "You can make stands for 'cats every two or three hundred yards if you want to. The wind just really cuts down on the sound and you've got to move in a little bit tighter."

### Before You Call

Scent control and a quiet approach are essential to successful bobcat calling.



### Calling Strategy

After we were settled in, Criner started calling. His sound of choice was the high-pitched cottontail and he used the electronic caller exclusively, leaving almost no time between calls.

"Cats are easily amused," Criner said. "They'll stop and watch birds, squirrels, turkeys, you know, whatever. So, when you're calling 'cats, you always want to keep your sound playing continuously.

"My favorite sounds are higher pitched rabbit sounds like the Johnny Stewart high-pitched cottontail or the Johnny Stewart 116A squealing bird. And I always keep them running continuously and busy. That way the 'cat doesn't lose attention."

Using an electronic caller helps keep the focus off of you, whether you're hunting bobcats, coyotes or any other predator. In fact, Morris, who was always a hand caller, credits his last two WCCC titles to switching almost exclusively to electronic calling with a wireless unit.

"The coyotes aren't looking at me anymore or looking at the caller at my feet," Morris said. "They're looking at the caller out in the open field and they're swinging to get downwind and they're swinging right into my lap.

"So, I have in the last two years switched from being a diehard hand caller to really, really enjoying and really loving the fact that I have that wireless caller out there squealing for me."

The electronic caller can also be used to position the animal, setting up an easier shot.



### Caller Placement

By strategically placing an electronic caller, you can “steer” predators “like a truck” to an advantageous shooting position, according to Hunter’s Specialties Pro Staffer Steve Criner.

“Sometimes, if you use electronics, you can kind of steer them like a truck,” Criner said. “You can have them approach your wireless caller instead of you and it kind of keeps them out of your scent cone.”

This strategy can be especially effective for the elusive bobcats, which typically are very cautious and will not come into open areas often before carefully analyzing where the sound is coming from.

### Colorado ‘Cat

I scanned the left-hand side of our setup for any signs of movement as Criner played the high-pitched cottontail sound. He was about 10 yards to my right, monitoring that side.

A gust of wind blew the trees in front of me so hard they looked like they might snap in half. I wondered if this was futile, if any bobcats would even be able to hear the calls.

But less than five minutes after we sat down, Criner lip squeaked — a sound he told me earlier he’d use to get my attention if an animal came in

on his side. I glanced in that direction and saw him raise his shotgun. About 60 yards off the end of his barrel stood a bobcat, frozen and staring at the electronic caller. The ‘cat had snuck down the hill and was now in the open.

I quickly positioned my gun on my Johnny Stewart Quik-Shot Shooting Stick, found the bobcat’s vitals in my scope and fired.

“Your first ‘cat!” Criner yelled at my side with an ear-to-ear smile and a high-five before I even ejected the brass from the Browning A-Bolt .223.

My smile was even bigger than his as I examined the female ‘cat on the ground in front of us, admiring its beautiful coat.

I picked up the bobcat — a true prize for any caller — and threw it over my shoulder as we started to make our way back to the truck. Suddenly, the wind didn’t seem so bad.

*Jared Blohm is the managing editor of Trapper & Predator Caller.*



# Poor-Weather Snaring for Bobcats

Learning how to use snares for 'cats will increase your catch in adverse conditions

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
**JOHN GRAHAM**

**T**he seasons for harvesting bobcats almost always occur during times with the possibility of harsh weather conditions. Freezing rain, high winds and snow are some of the conditions that you might have to put up with during a typical 'cat season, and all can have an effect on your success.

I have come to rely on snares very heavily over the years for bobcats, especially in foul weather.

## **Rough Terrain**

In most areas I have trapped 'cats through the years, the roughest country or heaviest cover holds the most 'cats. Experience has taught me that most of the prey base, such as cottontails, birds and rodents, frequent these places in larger numbers as they rely on cover to stay alive. Bobcats hunt these areas to take advantage of this fact.

Many times, the only 'cat sign is in the thickest cover. You should always try to set on sign.

'Cats will sometimes hunt through an area with sparse snow cover and leave very few footprints. It is their nature to not "track up" an area like canines might. Still, one good track is all that is needed for me to set up an area, as they will almost always return through the area. By setting snares in the right locations, your chances of connecting when they return increase dramatically.

## **Pinch Points**

When setting these areas, try to pick spots where the terrain or cover narrows down. Some people call these "pinch points."

Some of my favorite types of these locations are found along creek drainages. I run a large gamut of types of terrain, including sage brush draws, willow and ash thickets, cedar and juniper groves and rim rock locations. In many areas, the creek drainages connect various types of 'cat cover or locations. These spots can produce not only the resident 'cats, but any others that might use them as a corridor when traveling from area to area throughout the season.

Some locations have definite trails through the brush or vegetation. These trails might run parallel with the drainage. Others might cross the drainage, such as stock trails going to water. These trails should all be considered as potential snare locations.

I always tend to set heavy, and in some cases, I might have three or more snares on a single trail in a matter of several yards, and a dozen or more in an area of 50 square yards that might contain several trails.

I try to find naturally narrowed down spots or gaps to hang my snares, relying on them to guide the 'cats into the snare. Sure, I might place an object on one side of a gap that might be too open to rely on, but I prefer the natural spots. If you do decide to place some of your own guides at a spot, be sure to use objects

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that won't be blown in the wind or easily moved. This will help keep them in place and not change position enough to block the gap off.

### Natural Gaps

In some locations, trails are not very evident, or maybe only go a short distance. In these cases, I tend to set natural gaps. I usually determine these by simply standing at a natural pinch point and visualizing where a 'cat would travel. A light snow sometimes helps determine these not-so-obvious places, but some places really stand out if you take a minute or two to study the spot. Where a tree or brush forces a 'cat to hug a bank or where two clumps of brush form a gap between them are two examples.

In some cases, 'cats will travel along a high bank of a creek drainage, avoiding the actual creek bottom. I believe they do this because they are hunting while traveling and prefer to be above the heavy cover in the bottom. And, at times, especially in deep snow or drifting conditions, 'cats prefer to travel where the going is easier. Often, you will see where two or more 'cats hunting through the area will methodically work the cover. One might hunt up the bottom, while the other will walk the high bank, waiting to prey on any game that might erupt out of the bottom.

By having your snares in a variety of locations, you will have a better chance of having the bases covered.

### Long Drainages

I try to work in snares wherever I have access to long drainages. Depending on the area, these might be miles apart, in others, considerably closer. I set a lot of snares up and down the drainage. During periods of bad weather, 'cats will sometimes "hole up," maybe only traveling in a very small area for many days until the weather pattern moves out of the area. It is during these times that snares set on fresh sign can produce quickly, as the 'cats might be living right there, taking advantage of the local food source.

And, when the weather breaks, the bobcats and canines will start to put the miles on again, and travel these drainages.

Another reason I like to have snare set ups scattered along the length of drainages is because 'cats will rarely travel the full length of the drainage or creek. In some cases, they might only come in contact with it for several yards, and then leave it to hunt other cover.

Several times over the years I have tracked bobcats for a few miles and noticed how they would wander through the area, maybe hitting the same drainage two or three times in their travels. Almost always, it was obvious why the 'cat returned to the drainage at that particular spot. Sometimes it was a large, prominent tree, or an unusually large patch of heavy brush, or possibly a toilet area.

Whatever the reason, usually if a 'cat hunts an area once, it will return.

### Backing Up Footholds

I also find myself using snares more and more at some of my traditional trapping locations. Rock piles, saddles, long ridges, old roads and high banks make up the bulk of my 'cat locations. Some are set up with two or more traps to adequately cover the location. In some cases, especially when a particular location is the only place I have a chance at some 'cats I have found, I might have several sets.

It varies from location to location, but in most cases, a snare or two can be worked into the mix to cover the location even better. Again, some spots are obvious and others aren't. Some of my very best spots I use year after year are where I tracked a 'cat that avoided, or unknowingly missed, traps that I thought covered a location.

Snares strategically placed at traditional foothold locations will sometimes produce multiple catches, especially if you happen to have made a catch in a foothold. It is not uncommon to snare a second or even third 'cat that hung around its litter mate or mate until it came in contact with a snare. Sure, you will pick these multiple catches in footholds, too, but the variety of traps and snares doesn't hurt. To top it off, these extra snares produce a lot of heavy winter coyotes for me every year. These coyotes will hang around 'cat locations from time to time, effectively avoiding traps set for the 'cats. These snares readily pick them up, especially when the weather gets tough.

### Types of Snares

'Cats are easily dispatched in snares, especially when using lighter cables. Still, most spots that will connect with a 'cat stand a good chance of producing other animals, such as canines, so I prefer to use a dispatch-type lock (check your states' regulations). Cable size and type are a major consideration too for a variety of reasons.

## POOR-WEATHER SNARING FOR BOBCATS

I prefer the 1/16-inch 7x7 as an all-round 'cat snare. I have used 5/64-inch 7x7 with great success over the years also, especially when snaring spots where both 'cats and coyotes frequent and I never know which will show up. My third choice would probably be the 1/16-inch 1x19 cable, and I am using enough 3/64-inch 1x19 to know that it has its value, too.

'Cats usually don't avoid snares like coyotes can, but I have noticed 'cats will go around or possibly under a snare that is hung too high. Every year, I have people tell me that they have 'cats "go through their snares," and I'm sure it can happen. Still, I believe most times it is a case of a 'cat simply ducking under the bottom of the loop. In the snow, the tracks have the appearance that the 'cat actually did walk through it, but it's probably not the case. Bobcats usually don't run or trot down a trail like coyotes do, so they are encountering snares at a much slower pace. A snare hung at the wrong height is easily detected and avoided.

By using the lighter cables, you will have less refusals than the heavier cables, for obvious reasons. Also, lighter cable usually means the loop will close faster than heavier, stiffer cable. Again, neck catches are desired, so the faster the loop, the better.

Cable length is important also. I prefer fairly long snares, for a variety of reasons. It takes up to 42 inches of cable to make a loop that adequately fills some gaps I encounter. Most will take at least 32 inches. If you choose too short of snare, that doesn't al-

low much cable for anchoring.

Also, almost all states require some sort of break-away device to aid in releasing non-target catches. I prefer to use plenty of cable to allow these non-target animals to exert the force needed to allow the break-away device to work.

And, in a lot of cases, I will want a long cable to allow the snared 'cat to get away from the snare location or gap to help preserve the spot, so it can be used again. This is especially important in the arid areas of the west, where good tight gaps, suitable for snaring bobcats, can be at a premium.

For these reasons, I prefer a minimum of 8 feet in cable length. Most of my snares are used with a 6-foot extension, so conceivably, I am running 14 feet. I find this works well, and addresses all the points mentioned.

### Supporting Snares

How you hang your snares might be the most important part of all. Properly hung snares will take a lot of weather and be ready when the bobcat returns. Snaring 'cats can be a long-term effort and being able to run large numbers of sets with a minimum of maintenance is a bonus. Also, having them hung at the right height will up your percentage of neck catches.

I have gone to 11-gauge wire almost exclusively the last several years. It is easy to work with in cold weather and will support a snare as well as the heavier #9 wire. I also like the 11-gauge because it seems to cut down on refusals over the heavier wire, especially in lighter cover.

The first way I use it is when supporting off existing brush or trees. Length will vary from spot to spot, but I usually

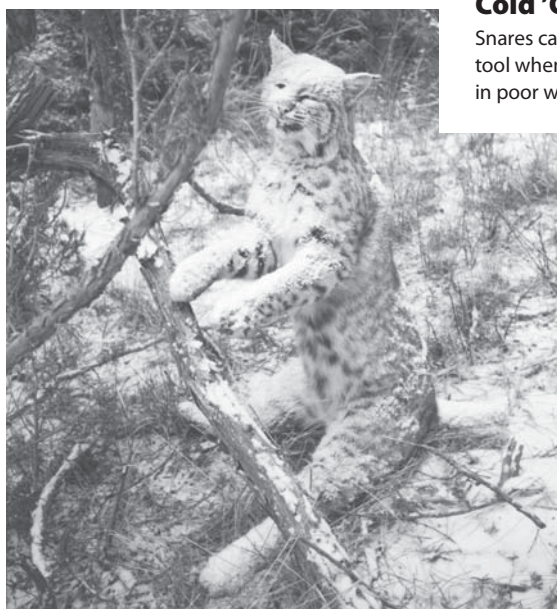
try to allow myself an extra foot or so more than it looks like it might need, so I am sure to have plenty.

It is important in this application that the object you are using is as solid as you can find. I also prefer it to be as close to the trail or gap as possible. This helps guide the 'cat into the snare and helps blend the snare in. I take the length of wire, and, starting as close to the ground as possible, actually weave it through the brush or along the main part of the brush until it is solid. The end or "pig-tail" of the cable should be slightly above and to the side of where you intend the snare to hang.

A variation of this is to use a simple support system. I have been using an effective support made with 30 inches of cold rolled steel, flattened on one

### Cold 'Cats

Snares can be an important tool when trapping bobcats in poor weather conditions.



## POOR-WEATHER SNARING FOR BOBCATS

end. A 20-inch piece of 11-gauge wire is welded close to the other end. With these supports, it is a simple matter of pounding them in the ground, and using them much the same way as using wire alone. I prefer to drive these into existing brush, tall grass or a juniper bough to help block the spot down and conceal the support.

I use a combination of these methods to support my snares. The ratio I use them varies, but I probably hang 75 percent of my snares with supports. They really speed things up and actually allow you to set some places that you couldn't otherwise.

With the support wire in place, open your snare loop to the desired size, and push the support wire into the support collar. By using the proper cable/collar/wire combination, you should have a snug fit, which will help support the snare. Any adjustment in height and position can be done now, by simply bending the wire.

By taking these measures you will have less problems with wind blowing your snares down, and heavy snows making them sag. These are both huge factors in winter snaring. Also, when your snare is hung as solid as possible, it is a simple matter of pulling the loop open to the support collar in the event the snare is knocked down when you return.

### Neck Catches

The size and height of the snare loop are also important. For the most part, my 'cat snares are 8 inches wide, although the size of the gap will help dictate how big your loop can be. I have set them from 6 inches to 10 inches, but 8 inches is my preferred width. As far as height, I have found that when targeting 'cats, a snare that is hung 8 inches from the ground to the bottom of the loop is optimum. In the case of a steep trail, I will lower it to 7 inches or so. I have caught many 'cats, especially large ones, in snares 9 ½ inches high, set for coyotes. On occasion, I have set snares for an unusually large coyote (evident by tracks) and will raise my loops to 9 inches or so.

I use the 8-inch Linesman Pliers I carry on my belt to help measure the height.

Having your loops positioned so they are in the exact center of the trail is important also, especially if the gap is a bit wider than it should be. I have found that snares hung at the right height in the center of the trail help compensate for a little too wide of gap.

### Anchoring

Methods to anchor vary from spot to spot, but one thing needs to be accomplished, no matter the method chosen. All snares should be anchored solidly to help the break-away device to work as intended and also help dispatch the animal quickly.

Disposable stakes of various types, rebar stakes and, of course, using cable extensions to tie off to a substantial tree or object will all work.

### Preparation

For years, I have used the time-proven method of boiling my snares in a pot of baking soda and water. Usually, a half box of it will be enough to treat several dozen snares. Length of time in the solution will vary, but remember, the longer they boil, the darker they will become. I usually average about five minutes, followed by a good rinse. Running them through the dishwasher also works.

I find myself painting more snares every year. I just buy the cheaper spray paints in either light gray or grass colored. Trying to match snare colors to the ever-changing weather conditions can drive you crazy, so I prefer to use the neutral gray color for most applications.

### Other Tips

When setting snares while it is snowing, raise the height of the loop up to compensate for the snow you are expected to receive.

When checking snares after a heavy snow, I will at times drag my feet the last several feet, moving the snow out of the trail. I also remove the snow under and beyond the snare the same way. 'Cats won't avoid this, and the snare will be hung the right height longer.

As the season progresses, continue to look for spots to set more snares, to cover the location better.

Never set snares in pastures or areas where livestock is present.

Snares can be an important tool when harvesting bobcats in adverse weather conditions. Learning how to use them to your advantage can pay off for you. If you are not already using them, give some a try. You might be surprised at the results.

*John Graham is an experienced trapper from Jordan, Mont.*





# The Power of Ki

This versatile coyote distress sound is more than just a follow-up call

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
**LANCE HOMMAN**

**T**o my right, sneaking in through the early morning fog, a group of four curious whitetail does crept toward me, their heads bobbing up and down, side to side. At 30 yards they stopped, their tails flared slightly, unsure of what lie before them. To my left and on the other side of the towering red cedar we'd chosen for cover, my partner gave me a dee-doo whistle — the universal sign meaning "There's a coyote!"

I turned my head slowly and saw that he already had his rifle shouldered. In order to pull the coyote's attention away from him, I began offering a soft, mournful series of jackrabbit death bellows. Seconds later, he shot.

I immediately switched out the closed reed call in my hand for my howler and launched into a panicked series of ki-yis and coyotes distress squeals. Seconds later, my partner shot again. This time, the report of the rifle was greeted by the satisfying "thwack" of bullet hitting bone. I ki-yi'd some more before

switching over to more jack distress. Stealing a look at my gunner, he nodded his head and smiled.

One down.

## Coyotes Causing Trouble

It was a late summer stand for two problem coyotes that had taken to chasing cattle in a nearby feedlot. In fact, the edge of the lot was so close I could have thrown a handful of the sand beneath me over my shoulder and gotten most of it inside the closest feed corral where close to 50 longhorn cattle stood in quiet tribute to our good fortune. Although coyotes and longhorn cattle don't generally mean problems, the feedlot owner was more concerned about the several hundred feeder calves he had on site and which this coyote had spent several days and nights running in and around their pens.

In this case, the coyote initially appeared at the peak of a sand berm barely 75 yards from where we sat, looking at my gunner straight on. Failing to ad-

just for such close proximity, the first shot went wide. Gunny racked another round as I ki-yi'd, unaware that the first shot had missed, and hoping to play to an unseen second set of ears. Just in case. What happened, though, was that the escaping coyote heard the distress yelps and returned to get one last look. Bad mistake. He took the 55-grain ballistic tip round through the right shoulder, anchoring him where he stood.

### The Secret Weapon

A mile west, another coyote was causing concern as well.

We relocated to work over No. 2, bolstered by our quick success at the feedlot. After parking the truck and walking nearly a quarter-mile over stubby sandhills and through water-filled drainages, we both found places to hide on a hillside, using cedars and sand plum thickets for cover, overlooking a small valley full of cedar trees and sumac groves.

I ranged the various landmarks around me and on the furthest side of the valley before offering up a pair of high-pitched howls. Several minutes later, as far away as I could see and still be in this pasture, I noted a white dot that hadn't been there before. A quick peek through the rangefinder revealed the throat patch of a large coyote, 353 yards away, and protected by a thin veil of tall bluestem blocking me from taking a shot.

I continued calling with soft, muted series of cottontail distress, but the coyote only feigned interest. Time to pull out the secret weapon. I ki-yi'd.

In contrast to the weak sounds used previously, my ki-yis were shrill and forceful — real attention getters. And, they worked.

The coyote peeled from the sumac thicket and began threading his way toward me, using cedars to cover his approach. At a pre-ranged 280 yards, he still enjoyed the protection of the bluestem, and I was too exposed to risk moving laterally to free up my line of sight. To my right, Gunny spotted a bobcat giving me the stink eye and raised his rifle to get a better look. Fortunately for the coyote, and unfortunately for us, the approaching coyote had just cleared line of sight with his position, saw Gunny raise his rifle and turned to leave.

### Social Dogs

The ki-yi, or coyote distress, has to be one of the least used, and most misunderstood calls in the coy-

ote caller's lexicon. Whereas coyotes are regarded to be highly sociable animals, few people discover the most effective means of exploiting that nature and capitalizing on their behavior.

As a rule of thumb, I carry at least one howler on every stand and have a coyote distress sound file readily available on every e-caller I own. Although we open many setups with howling, there are times when I lean solely on jackrabbit or cottontail distress. If, and when, a coyote appears and we make a shot, one of two things happens: the coyote dies or it doesn't. Regardless, my next move is to immediately offer a series of ki-yis.

In the case of a miss, ki-yis will occasionally bring a coyote back to the game, or compel one to check up and stop at a comfortable range of 100 yards or so.

In the event of a kill, I'm playing to a second coyote, even if I haven't seen anything to indicate one is around. You just never know. More than once, I've been surprised to see a second set of ears appear over a terrace or rise off in the distance.

What most callers don't realize — including seasoned veteran callers — is that the coyote distress sound is also an effective and unbeatable frontline calling sound. Rather than beginning a stand with the customary two lone howls, or 15-second series of "bunny blues," shake things up with a raucous round of "help me! I'm dying!" in fluent coyote-ese.

### Loud and Passionate

When it comes to coyote distress, volume really isn't an issue. Maybe a rabbit, late in its expiration, will moan mournfully as it drags itself toward the light, but that's generally not the case with coyotes. Anyone who has ever gotten a bad hit on a coyote will attest to this fact. Few are modest about letting every other coyote in four counties know that things just turned south for them, and it's safe to say that the coyote is predictably passionate when it comes to portraying his pain.

Therefore, when using ki-yis, do so with sincere inspiration. Take a deep breath and really lay into the howler. Authenticity isn't mandatory because, after all, coyotes don't get a lot of practice making this particular vocalization so they probably won't really know the real deal from Memorex.

Howlers work best for coyote distress, but any open reed call will suffice in a pinch. Open reed and bite calls are also quite effective at reproducing the

higher-pitched puppy distress whines.

Having said that, my favorite distress yelps are those that start out with a driving, coarse, gravelly scream from deep down in the coyote's throat, rising quickly and sharply to a tapering, high-pitched squeal — the kind of scream that you know comes from their toenails. And, the kind of bawl that screams “panic” and makes the hair on your neck stand on end.

## Attention Getter

Like most people, I've always limited the duration of my ki-yis to a relatively short span of time. Not so much because a coyote lacks the endurance to yelp for several minutes, but because I do. Coyote distress is a relatively labor intensive sound requiring a lot of lung power and a willing diaphragm. It doesn't take long to get winded using ki-yis and, therefore, this is a great time to let an e-caller do your bidding. In recent years, I've let the caller run continuously for as long as a minute or more. And I've seen some success, at least enough to know that this is a technique that is well worth my attention.

Again, it cannot be overstated that you need to be ready with ki-yis at any point on a stand. This is the type of sound that plays upon the sociable side of coyote psyche. I wouldn't go so far as to call it irresistible, but to a coyote, it is a real attention getter.

## A Double

At the end of this past season, I was hunting with a new partner on unfamiliar ground. Shortly after opening the stand with a pair of lone howls, Kevin spotted a pair of coyotes working their way toward me through the tall grass nearly 300 yards away. In what always seems to be a surprisingly short amount of time, the first of the two appeared on a cow path directly behind me and only 30 yards away. Concerned for my safety, Kevin promptly served the coyote a load of hot copper and lead.

I turned my head and saw the coyote beating feet east, its tail corkscrewing as it did so, telling me he was running out of the good stuff. I grabbed my howler and began screaming and squealing in agony. Unfamiliar with the concept that you could actually keep calling a stand after you've killed a coyote, or that a second coyote is still callable even though the first of the pair has assumed room temperature, Kev-

## Frontline Sound

Many callers use the ki-yi distress call as a follow-up call, but it can also be used effectively as a frontline calling sound.



in had stepped out from the cover of his hidey hole. As soon as I began ki-yi-ing, he stepped back to see what would unfold.

Seconds later, number two appeared on the same cow path, stopping in the same spot. Appropriately, Kevin shot and dropped her in that same spot, as well — his first true double and a convincing introduction to the power of the “ki.”

## Go-To Sound

The ki-yi has always been regarded by many of those who claim to understand it as a follow-up sound — the type of sound you employ in emergencies to stop runners. In fact, the ki-yi is a top shelf, go-to sound that can and should be used at any time of the year when family groups remain together and when social bonds in coyotes are present.

In addition to stopping runners, or standing up those yet unseen, the ki-yi is also an effective and reliable way to break stubborn coyotes loose from distant cover when they resist responding to everything else.

Callers who truly understand the ki-yi truly understand the awesome power it possesses.

*Lance Homman of Abilene, Kan., is an avid predator caller and field editor for T&PC.*





# Last Year's Lessons

Reflecting on past seasons' successes and failures can help improve your fox totals

STORY AND PHOTOS BY

**DAVE KAPROCKI**

**T**his fall, in preparation for the upcoming predator-calling season, I thought it would be interesting to reflect back on last year's season. This exercise is generally entertaining because there are always situations that happened that make me chuckle. After close to 40 years of calling, I still find myself mumbling about why I did this or that in certain situations. It's an ongoing learning experience. Same with you?

As you read through this article, pay attention to the little things that either worked, or did not work, during certain situations.

Here in Pennsylvania, I generally hunt fox from November through January, when the pelts are prime. However, even in late January, the pelts start to become rubbed due to the mating process.

## The Opener

My season started out the second week of November. The air temperature of 53 degrees was a little warmer than I like. The good thing was that the winds were calm and the skies overcast — a very nice combination.

I was with my hunting buddy Clifton Hatch. Our plan was to hunt all night and attempt to take both red and gray foxes. We loaded our gear into my truck and headed off.

This turned out to be a great night of hunting. In reviewing my records, I see we called in eight reds and three grays at 14 stands. However, only five reds

were shot and no grays were taken. To you math wizards, this is a 45 percent kill rate. Upon further review, I see that during the past 30 plus years of calling, my average kill percentage is 44, so this particular night was right on track. It comes down to about four out of every 10 foxes are killed.

I know some of you are now thinking that this percentage should be higher. Keep in mind that a fox is extremely cautious and many variables can lead to one getting away. One night, I called in 11 and shot 10. Other nights, I've called in five and didn't cut a hair. It all averages out.

## First Stand of the Season

Hatch and I walked down a fencerow along a grassy field and decided to set up within 50 yards of the corner. The wind was blowing from the field, over our shoulders, and into the woods behind us — a perfect set up. When I started calling, my gut kept telling me we should be down toward the corner further. Sure enough, a red fox popped out near the corner. It simply refused to come in closer. We finally walked back to the truck.

It's important to learn from experiences like this. If you hunt open fields, try to get within shooting distance of a corner whenever possible. Fox love these areas and feel comfortable taking a peep from that location.

Another mishap occurred when we were set up along a cut cornfield, tight against the brush. For

## LAST YEAR'S LESSONS

some reason, we did not set up in our normal fashion, which is to sit 20 yards out in the field instead of along the brush line. A fox generally will approach along the brush line in an attempt to get downwind of your position, offering a close shot. But since we were tight against the brush, the fox came in and then circled into the woods behind us and caught our scent.

I knew better, but ignored my own advice and got busted. My suggestion is to experiment with this simple technique of sitting in the field 20 to 30 yards from the edge. Most of the time a fox will not hesitate to run in along the brush line and you'll end up with a 20-yard shot. Give it a try this fall.

### More Entries

I continued reading through my records and started laughing to myself when I got to the Nov. 21 entry. This was a night filled with lots of foxes responding to my calls, but no shots taken. Yep, you guessed it, more mishaps that could have been avoided.

My son, Justin, accompanied me on this hunt. He knows a good deal about fox calling, but simply has not had the experience that Hatch and I have.

We hunted a total of nine stands lasting three hours. In this period, we called in six reds and didn't get a single shot. I know, you're probably asking yourself how that can be. Trust me, I

was too that night!

There are several things to learn from this night that apply to hunting with your son/daughter or an inexperienced hunter.

Have patience and don't expect them to know everything you do about fox hunting.

Put them in a position at a stand that will likely produce a shot.

We headed into a cut cornfield and walked up towards the top of the hill. Justin wanted to go directly to the top of the field while I knew better than to be silhouetted. He insisted, so I told him to go where he felt comfortable while I stayed down low against the brush. I started calling and within one minute, a red fox was circling below me.

I attempted to signal Justin to get ready as a fox was circling up his way. Long story short, Justin never looked in my direction and had no clue a fox was within 30 yards of him. The fox saw Justin and ran. The funny thing is that Justin continued sweeping his light across the field not knowing what just happened.

I shook my head, chuckled to myself and continued calling. It didn't take long until a pair of reds came in from across the field. Justin saw them first and started flashing his light in my direction to inform me of the sighting. To my amazement, they came in and then ran off. Yep, once again, they saw Justin's silhouette against the night sky.

After I finished calling that stand, he walked back to me and seemed a little dejected about the whole thing. I told him our main objective is to have fun together even if we don't kill a fox.

I then explained that I should have coached him better on how/where to set up so he wouldn't have been silhouetted. I took the burden off him and that cheered him up very quickly. We walked back to the truck laughing about the whole thing.

### Moonlit Night

After continuing to read down through my entries, I came across a night where we had some recent snow and a very bright moon. In my opinion, a bad combination! I was hunting solo that night and my records indicated that I called in three reds and didn't kill any of them.

### Corners

If you hunt open fields, try to get within shooting distance of a corner whenever possible. Foxes feel comfortable in these locations.



## LAST YEAR'S LESSONS

### Lessons to Learn

No matter how successful or unsuccessful you are in a season, there are always lessons to learn before the next season arrives.



After carefully analyzing each stand, I was able to determine that I was not hidden enough. Moonlight reflecting off snow can be very bright. It's amazing how well you can see under these conditions. So can a fox! I did not utilize my snow camouflage that night and paid the price. Again, I knew better, but didn't head my own advice of being well hidden in snow.

### Season-Ending Hunt

My records indicate that I ended my season with one final hunt at the end of January. The entry reads that three reds and two grays were called in. I successfully shot two of the reds and both grays. However, there is a side note telling me that one of the reds was rubbed pretty good. This is a natural occurrence during the mating season and affects reds more than grays. It also signals to me that the season

is over for another year. Here in Pennsylvania, the season actually continues into mid-February.

One year, I killed a gray fox in mid-February. I noticed the belly was quite large so decided to investigate. I opened her up and found she was full of little ones inside. I felt terrible! I decided I would not hunt much beyond mid-January due to this reason. It's simply a personal choice.

### Parting Thoughts

The 2007 season went way too quickly, but was filled with the joy of hunting with family and friends. I enjoyed reviewing last year's events and sharing them with you. Hopefully it reminded you of some great moments during your own hunts.

Looking back, what really stands out to me is the importance of enjoying the sport for what it is, and sharing quality time with family and friends while doing it. To me, that's really the essence of hunting in general. I believe most of you would agree.

And like I always say, don't forget to look up once in a while and admire the stars. They seem to come alive after midnight.

*Dave Kaprocki is an experienced predator caller from Harrisburg, Penn.*

