

Calling Coyotes—Sealing the Deal

As the screams drifted across the sage, my eyes scanned continually and my head was on a swivel knowing a coyote could appear at any moment. The earlier I detected him the more time I'd have to plan my final play. Would he end in the truck or wiser and warier than when he arrived? In short could I seal the deal or not? There. Was that light gray spot there when we sat down? I watch without raising my binoculars. There's a movement. Now he's working his way through the sage again. My partner this day is a longtime friend but a brand new predator hunter and we're set up together on opposite sides of the sage. My quiet attempts at getting him on the coyote were falling on partially deaf ears from too many years running a Skil saw. Before long, "One o'clock" gets through and he's on the coyote also.

My friend is shooting one of my rifles and I'm confident the rifle and load are up to the task. The coyote clears the sage onto an open flat at less than 200 yards. He's responding carefully with stop and go progress. I tell my partner to take him when he stops the next time. A moment later the coyote stops and he sends it knocking the coyote down but a second later he's up circling then he's moving off at a slow, struggling run. Coyotes are tough and I hate to lose any to a bad shot. When my friend can't get back on him, I took one shot and a moment later the AR barks again and the coyote is on the ground for good.



When The Approach is right, the Set-Up is effective and the calling works, it's all for naught if you can't seal the deal. The set-up is the key to allowing you opportunity to see responding coyotes. What happens after you see the coyote will determine whether the coyote ends up in the fur shed or at the graduation ceremony receiving its diploma which it will proudly display at the next encounter with a predator caller. We are fortunate this day that the coyote is down. Should I have let it play out longer? Probably. But, a shot at a standing coyote at 170 yards is a much better bet than a

running coyote at half that distance. Taking an approaching coyote allows for a more relaxed shot than hurrying or feeling the pressure that comes when a coyote is leaving the stand.

Many things play into the ability to seal the deal. The coyote's mindset, the gun, load and equipment, the shooter's skill and experience as well as the ability to read the coyote body language all play into the moment of truth. In an earlier article I related a sad statistic from one of our first calling seasons. We called nineteen coyotes that year and killed only three of them. The school of hard knocks is pretty brutal sometimes—primarily on your ego. The learning curve is steep but there are things a hunter can do to shorten the curve. I hope the information here will help whether you've been at the game for a while or are new to predator hunting.

The majority of hunters reading this are either into long range hunting or are considering it. Those with some experience already have an appreciation for the need for an accurate rifle and load as well as the need for a steady rest. Both of these will increase the odds of collecting the fur from the next coyote

that appears at your stand. The major difference is that our objective in calling is to get the coyote as close as necessary to ensure a good, lethal shot. The circumstances are different than with pure long range hunting however. We've intentionally stirred the coyote up. He's more than likely either in the process of coming or going. We have a finite amount time to take the shot or miss the opportunity. That's not to say that ambushing a coyote or setting up for a long shot on a coyote that's working a meadow will necessarily allow us all the time in the world but in general, calling will limit the time frame for the shot.

The coyote's mindset determines how much that timeframe is shortened. A coyote coming in hot will usually leave just as hot. A coyote picking its way to the stand will be more likely to stop on its exit if it hasn't been shot at yet. During the last coyote calling competition we hunted, my son and I had more hot coyotes than usual responding to the call. Normally we'll bark the coyotes to a stop for a decent rifle shot but that weekend they were coming hard and then leaving just as hard. By the end of the hunt we determined to get proficient with a shotgun to avoid watching coyotes running over the hill. A double carry of both a rifle and a shotgun can give more flexibility in how you handle hard charges. I recommend an article Dustin Butler wrote for the December 2011 Predator Extreme magazine on shotgunning coyotes if you are interested in putting your shotgun to work on predators. For those who are primarily rifle hunters, we need to adapt to make the most of the opportunities.

The two things the rifle hunter needs from his firearm is accuracy and flat trajectory. If you are trying to save fur, you'll also need a bullet with the best terminal performance to minimize fur damage. (See the article entitled Fur Loads from the February 2011 edition of LRH magazine.) Although benchrest accuracy isn't necessary for coyotes, it's hard to have too much. A coyote isn't very big once the hair comes off. For hunting in the West, I strive for loads that will group one and a half inches at 200 yards for a three shot string. Ideally, the cartridge's trajectory will allow for a 200 yard zero with a maximum midrange trajectory of around one inch. Using the Maximum Point Blank Range (MPBR) theory of sighting in (usually around a 250 yard zero for most of the hotter varmint cartridges on a five inch vital size) resulted in too many misses at 150 to 175 yards. The slightest bobble results in shooting over coyotes. A 200 yard zero will still allow centermass holds out to 250 yards with most cartridges and covers 95% of our called coyotes.

The optics for a calling rifle need to be durable, transmit a reasonable amount of light and have enough field of view (FOV) to allow the hunter to pick up the animal easily through the scope. Many coyote hunters put high magnification scopes on their calling rifles. I've missed far more opportunities from too small a FOV than from not having enough magnification. I like a minimum FOV of around 35 feet at 100 yards. This usually means a variable scope with a lower ends of 2.5 to 3X. It's rare to need more than eight or nine power for a shot at a coyote but if you need more upper-end magnification, look at the four to six factor scopes. Shotgun carry allows one to get away with less FOV since the scattergun will be deployed on the close shots anyway. Many long range hunters feel handicapped hunting without a turret. Some of the Tactical scopes combine high FOV scopes with tactical or target turrets and companies such as Leupold will retro fit a number of turrets to their lower magnification range variables for a reasonable fee. A Leupold VX3 2.5-8X with a CDS turret installed by their Custom Shop would be hard to beat for the vast majority of coyote calling. The rangefinder you use for your LR shooting will also come in handy for a coyote that hangs up and determining the maximum distance for your shotgun or rifle before beginning calling. Choose some landmarks outlining your kill zone then start calling.

The accuracy potential of your rifle won't be realized without some form of rest. Portable shooting aids will greatly increase your ability to hit the grapefruit-size vitals of a coyote. I virtually always sit in front of vegetation or rocks to break up my outline while still allowing an unrestricted field of fire. Relying on field rests restricts the options in stand location.. Options in bipods and sticks are almost endless these days. Just ensure that whatever you choose allows you to shoot over vegetation and is tall enough to

work when setting up on a slope. A bipod that worked well on the rifle range may not be tall enough when set up on a slope.

While generally not as stable as a bipod, shooting sticks have the advantage of being able to make quick height adjustments by simply kicking the legs apart or together. My son leaves his Harris prone bipod attached to his rifle then uses sticks when in the sitting position. I like the Stoney Point Rapid Pivot Bipod. It has a rubber attachment point for the legs so the legs can be opened or closed for height adjustment like sticks but still attaches to the rifle via a push on/pull off attachment point so your rifle and bipod can be moved as one unit when repositioning for incoming coyotes. As the name implies, the bipod pivots in a panning motion. I use the sitting/kneeling height for most of my calling and carry the prone height bipod in my cargo pocket for use when the opportunity for a prone set up arises or I need to get more stable for a longer shot. With practice groups of less than two inches at 200 yards can be accomplished off the sitting height bipod.

Experience on stand is invaluable to the coyote hunter. The more animals the hunter can observe, the more able he is to anticipate a coyote's actions. Coyote fever can grip a hunter especially when he isn't sure what the coyote is going to do. If you anticipate the coyote busting you at any second, the nerves can run wild. I hope I never get over the excitement of an approaching coyote but experience can calm the nerves and allow good decisions to be made and more coyotes to hit the ground. Watching coyote hunting DVD's or television shows also helps the hunter learn coyote body language. When carrying only a rifle, stop the coyote whenever it gets into your comfortable rifle range and take the shot. I use a quick bark with my voice to stop the coyote as it tries to determine who else is in the area. A whistle can also cause the coyote to check up but after one particular stand, I quit relying on the whistle as my primary mode of stopping coyotes.

My son called one morning on his way to school to tell me he'd seen three coyotes crossing onto our property. I put on my camo, grabbed my calling gear and headed out to see if they'd respond to my call. After a few howls and more distress cries, I thought they'd given me the slip. Then after a full 20 minutes into the stand they appeared at a full run coming down the fenceline towards me. When they were less than 100 yards away, I tried to whistle them to a stop and found that the cold, dry desert air had dried my lips and nothing would come out! The coyotes overran my position and scattered in several directions. I got only one offhand shot but I was too rattled to connect. Whistling might work for Randy Anderson but I have barked my coyotes to a stop since that day!

Moving coyotes aren't impossible to hit but they are challenging. Try to stop them if possible, carry a shotgun for the hard chargers and use some form of shooting aid to steady your rifle. Putting fur on the ground is what it's all about. When everything comes together, make sure you're ready to seal the deal!

Good luck and good hunting.

God Bless,

Tim

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