

Bobcat Calling Primer

"I've got two coyotes coming from across the draw." Carl whispered from the far side of the boulder. Moments later, a bobcat appeared on top of the rimrock. "Cat.", I whispered back. Even though this was Carl's hunt, he unselfishly told me to forget about the coyotes and take the 'cat. Like molasses I slowly adjusted my rifle and bipod for the steep uphill shot and the big bobcat disappeared at the shot. There was little doubt it was down but it was well after dark before I got to him, a big male that would bring some serious change at the fur auction.



Another day my son Ben and I made a stand that could have been as productive for coyotes as for bobcats. This time I was the one watching downhill for coyotes while Ben watched the rim for 'cats. Several minutes into the stand, Ben shot. A couple of minutes later another shot rang out. I gave the stand a few more minutes but curiosity got the best of me and I went to see what the shooting was about. As I approached Ben, his grin made it obvious he had scored.

"Dog or 'cat?", I ask. "Cats.", Ben

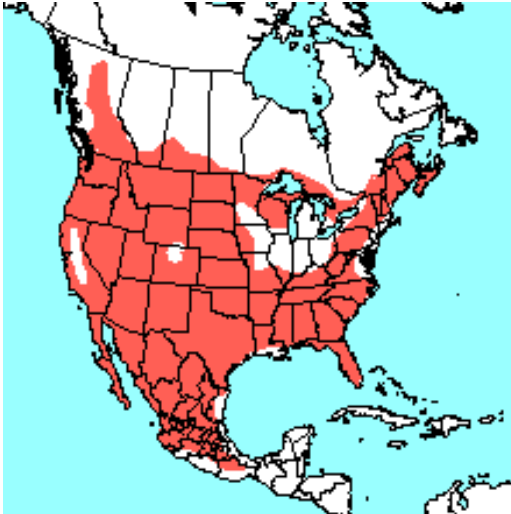
responds. "Two of them!" The retrieval was a little hairy but Ben had an extremely rare double on bobcats! He killed a nice coyote two stands later and, almost miraculously, the very next stand after the coyote Ben and I doubled again on bobcats. Four bobcats in one day might not be highly unusual in Texas but it's unheard of in the Northwest. I joke that we should have gone to town to buy lottery tickets!

Bobcats are special. Their unique fur is sought after for the beautiful spotted belly. The hair is like silk. They are an amazing trophy and currently one of the highest value furs in North America. Bobcats are also unique in other characteristics that affect the way a hunter pursues them. The coyote hunter must make adjustments based on bobcat biology, physiology and psychology to increase his success on 'cats. Since we're



going to school, we'll add some geography to the mix also.

Geographically, the bobcat is spread across much of the US and Canada. There are few states where a caller cannot pursue 'cats. State laws vary in the level of protection afforded the bobcat. Check your local game regulations to ensure you are within the laws for your state.



Biologically, fur quality varies depending on latitude. Bobcat pelts prime much more slowly than those of coyotes. In my home state of Oregon the season opens the first of December but pelt quality increases into February. The silky fur of the bobcat doesn't rub like coyotes so there is no concern about pelt quality reduction as the winter progresses.

So, what adjustments should the coyote hunter make when targeting 'cats? The first is changing locales. Even though their distribution is large, bobcats are not as numerous as coyotes. It may be seemingly obvious but if you want to call 'cats, you need to be within earshot of 'cats. Scouting and experience will tell you where to go. Scat and tracks help identify bobcat areas.

Bobcat scat is similar to coyote but more segmented like a Tootsie Roll. The ends of the scat are more blunt than that of a coyote's as well. Tracks will show no claws as their retractable claws do not leave marks. Bobcat tracks are more round in shape than those of the coyote as well. Bobcat like brushy areas and many times will gravitate to rocky areas. However, a trapper once told me that the biggest 'cats are out on the flats. They have little fear of running into a coyote.



Because bobcats have amazing natural camouflage, optics are a greater advantage while calling bobcats than they are when targeting coyotes. At a minimum scan the area at the end of the stand. Bobcats are famous for just appearing out of nowhere. Binoculars help pick out the bobcat's head as it sits studying the area from which the call is originating. Be very careful to move slowly while deploying the binoculars and while scanning. More on this later.

Night hunting where legal can help a hunter overcome the incredible camouflage of the bobcat. The glowing eyes give their presence away even in heavier cover and since the 'cats are hunting the night shift, they may respond easier. Ensure you have a sufficient shooting light to make a positive identification before the shot. Huge gains in light technology continue to benefit the nighttime caller.

The second adjustment the coyote hunter needs to make is the length of his or her stands.

Psychologically, bobcat are not as bold as coyotes (although, big, dominant 'cats won't necessarily follow this trend either). Bobcats **stalk** their prey. Because of this, bobcat stands need to be longer than coyote stands.

A friend of mine regularly stays on stand for up to an hour and a half. My patience won't stand that but I will extend the time on stand when in bobcat country. I've found that when calling rimrock country, 'cats will usually show up on the top of the rim within a reasonable amount of time. If you need the 'cat to respond all the way to your call before seeing it, give them more time. They may cut the initial distance quickly then slow as they make the final stalk on the "prey". You may find it helpful to use a seat or cushion to stay comfortable allowing you to remain still during extended stands.

Bobcats also tend to have a little ADD so "busier" sounds may work better at keeping their attention. Bird sounds and cottontail sounds may be more effective on your 'cat stands. For the same reason, I run my caller continuously. I also change sounds more often when calling bobcat. Coyotes are intimidating to most bobcats so avoid coyote vocalizations when calling in 'cat country.

Finally, bobcats seem to have no "call memory". It's been said that a bobcat which is shot at and missed may be called back an hour later with the same exact sound. It's extremely unlikely a coyote would be fooled again so easily.

The largest adjustment the coyote caller needs to make when hunting bobcats has to do with the bobcat's senses.

Physiologically, a quick look at the characteristics of the bobcat gives a clue to this. The cat's nose is much shorter than the coyote's. This hints at the sensual priorities of the animals. That long snout of the coyote houses many more scent receptors than the bobcat's short nose. You will never completely fool a coyote's nose. Cats, on the other hand, seem to pay little attention to scent. Bobcats can be called from straight downwind giving the hunter much more flexibility in bobcat stand selection. The bobcat's nose may not be an issue for the predator caller but the eyes are another story and the reason for the next adjustment.

To be an effective bobcat caller, a hunter must understand the visual perceptiveness of the bobcats. This is important on multiple levels. If a coyote's nose can never be fooled, the same

may be said for a bobcat's eyes at least where movement is concerned. Concealment is critical. [\(See my article "Camouflage, Concealment and Coyotes"\)](#). Good concealment and slow movement cannot be overemphasized when calling bobcats.

All the rules of concealment when calling coyotes pertain to bobcats in spades. Set in front of something to break up your outline. Sit in the shade whenever possible. Keep the sun behind you. Cover your hands and face as well as anything shiny on your firearm and equipment. Of all these things movement is by far the most critical. As with coyotes, it's not necessary to remain completely motionless but your movements must be sloooooow.

My personal move from handcalls to electronic callers was specifically for calling bobcats. My son, Ben, is a very accomplished handcaller but after calling many 'cats that others shot, he had never shot a 'cat himself. The issue was the movement associated with operating the call. The bobcats picked up the motion of his hand as he manipulated the call.

We had one interesting stand on which Ben called a coyote that I shot at the five minute mark. A bobcat then walked in front of me just six feet from the toes of my boots as it moved away from Ben. It had spotted the motion as he called. I had to let the cat move away from me behind some brush before I could raise my rifle and finish an interesting coyote-bobcat double as the 'cat reappeared in the next opening.



The greatest advantage of e-calls when coyote hunting is found in it enabling the hunter to set downwind or crosswind of the caller. With bobcats, it's found in the ability to remain motionless while on stand. If volume isn't necessary, the e-caller needn't be very expensive. My first bobcat came into an inexpensive Cass Creek caller using a small speaker on a 20 foot cord--a dinosaur by today's standards.

The visual acuity that makes movement critical for the successful bobcat caller can be used to his or her advantage. A motion decoy can capture the 'cat's attention allowing much more flexibility for scanning and moving the gun into position for a shot. Small, fast, unthreatening decoys such as the MOJO Critter or the Jack series of decoys by Foxpro work excellent. Depending on the circumstances I may or may not use a decoy for coyotes but I **always** use a motion decoy when targeting 'cats. A feather hung from an arrow shaft or limb can also work as a decoy but only if a breeze is present to activate it.

Physiologically, the bobcat is thinner skinned than the coyote and somewhat less muscular. Saving that valuable pelt or trophy may require an adjustment to your fur load as well. A lighter bullet may be necessary to keep it from exiting a 'cat. The 35 grain Berger from a .204 is still my favorite load for 'cats but the .17

calibers with heavier constructed bullets are also excellent. Your .22 centerfire calibers with the 50 and 55 grain Hornady V-max or a 50 grain Nosler Ballistic Tip will be good bobcat medicine. Keep in mind that the lighter skin, muscle and bone structure of the bobcat will not soak up as much bullet energy as a coyote without exiting. Holes are a greater issue on bobcat hides than other furbearers. Ryan Custiss of American Hide and Fur Company says that the fat of the bobcat sometimes present after sewing makes repairs more easily detectable on the finished fur. The last thing a hunter wants is a value robbing hole in a bobcat hide. Adjust your fur load accordingly.

The high fur market has put a tremendous amount of pressure on bobcat populations across the country. Whether you are after bobcats for a trophy or for profit adjusting your tactics with their biology, psychology and physiology in mind will increase your success substantially. And, since bobcat hunting is much more interesting than school, class is out. The test will happen in the field. Good luck and good hunting.

God Bless,

Tim Titus

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