

Coyote Calling—The Set-up

I settled in front of the juniper tree adjusting my Bipod legs to the height needed to make an effective shot on the creek bottom before me. A little over four minutes into Adult Cottontail from my Foxpro Fury two coyotes were loping towards the caller. The closest coyote clears the brush but decides it doesn't like what it isn't seeing. It turns back into the brush but stops as I let out a bark with my voice. Only its head and neck are visible over the brush but it moves a few feet back towards the call and the 35 grain Berger from my .204 AR finds its mark. As the first coyote tips over, the second coyote makes a break back the way it came. My second shot finds the shoulder of the other coyote at 150 yards as it runs through the sage. Watching the coyote roll through the scope almost surprises me as it connects-- not a high percentage shot. Satisfaction indeed.



The hottest topic in predator hunting is sounds. Callers obsess about hand calls vs. electronic calls, specific sounds, sound sequences, coyote vocalizations, how long to call, how loud to call, etc, etc, etc. New callers become intimidated by the subject and may even be afraid to start predator hunting because they aren't confident in the sounds they are producing. While calls and calling are important, the specific sound you make is several rungs down the ladder of importance in calling coyotes. If you sound panicked and under distress, you can call coyotes. You don't have to mimic the exact sound

your favorite television professional makes. It's just not that critical. The Set-up is by far the most important factor in successfully calling coyotes. My previous article dealt with The Approach. This article will cover The Set-up and the factors affecting it.

During the stand related at the beginning of this article, elevation gave me a great view of the flat, the sun behind me made it hard for an approaching coyote to see me and the juniper broke up my outline. Even after giving my position away with a loud bark, the coyotes couldn't make me out and it was all laid out in a way that the wind would not give me away. When it comes to calling coyotes, set-up is everything!

The set-up is how and where the hunter locates him or herself, where your hunting partner positions himself and where the caller is placed if you're using an electronic caller. The terrain, vegetation and weather, specifically the wind, all affect the choice of the set-up. Choosing the most effective set-up will maximize your opportunity to see and then execute shots on incoming predators. Conversely, ineffective set-ups result in either not seeing the predators you call or being unable to make good shots on those you see. Either way educated predators are the result. For the predator hunter, making better set-ups is the single most important factor in increasing the number of coyotes that actually make it into the truck.

In some circumstances, the terrain you hunt can't be changed. ADC work will limit the area you choose to hunt since specific areas with problem animals are targeted. If your primary hunting property is land you own, your choices may also be limited. But, if you have a choice, call areas that lend themselves to effective set-ups. As primarily a rifle hunter, I look for terrain with some varying topography. My ideal stand has me on a slope above a flat. This allows me a commanding view of the area from which I expect a predator to approach. A second alternative when using an electronic caller is to position yourself on the flat with a view of a hillside. Having an opportunity to see the approaching predator with enough time to reposition for the shot will greatly increase the chance of making an effective shot under controlled circumstances. Shotgunners have much more flexibility in this regard since the scattergun is much easier to make fast, moving shots on coyotes. The basic principle is the same though—you can't shoot what you don't see. Use the terrain and vegetation to your advantage. Western hunters with a lot of land to choose from can be more selective about the terrain they hunt increasing the odds of seeing and getting shots on incoming coyotes. However, the principles are the same regardless of where you hunt.

Vegetation affects your ability to see approaching coyotes. A friend of mine prefers to be surprised when the coyote shows up. He says that seeing coyotes too far in advance allows his nerves get the best of him! To each his own. I want time to reposition myself for the shot and enough open area to be able to pick off a coyote before it gets the wind on me. When shotgunning in heavy brush, the "open" area may be only 20 or 30 yards. In more open desert it may be 250 yards but doesn't have to be that far. Vegetation also determines the shade of clothing or camo you should choose. A dark green ghillie suit works great in the forest or against a backdrop of junipers but stands out like the proverbial sore thumb in sage or grease wood. Choose a shade that blends in whether camo or earth tones.

Weather factors influencing stand set-up include the wind and cloud cover. My primary rule regarding the wind is that I want to be able to see the downwind. If there is one thing that will make a better predator hunter and result in fewer educated coyotes it's Titus' Rule. Titus' Rule is "Make 'em show themselves if they want the downwind." The distance a hunter needs to see downwind decreases with the density of the vegetation. In other words tighter cover requires less downwind view. It isn't necessary to face downwind just be sure it can be monitored regularly. Lack of a downwind view will educate coyotes. Period. Not all coyotes will circle downwind but many will especially if they've been called before.

The use of coyote vocalizations, especially howls, results in more coyotes moving downwind. The coyotes are attempting to identify the animal they heard—sort of a long distance butt sniffing if you will. Dominant animals are less likely to feel the need to circle than more subordinate coyotes. Coyote pairs also seem to be bolder in approaching howls. The backup of the second coyote gives them more confidence. Bobcats rarely use scent and wind is not a factor when targeting them but coyotes rely heavily on their nose. Don't underestimate it.

Sunshine may be your friend or your enemy depending on what direction it's coming from. If you've ever forgotten your cap and attempted to hunt into the sun, you realize what an advantage having the sun behind you can be. When a coyote is looking into the glare, it is a much harder to see a hunter. The sun also illuminates approaching coyotes making them easier to spot. On the other hand, sitting in direct sunlight will accentuate your movements and cause the shine of optics or uncovered bright finishes on your firearms and equipment. Set up in the shade whenever possible. Overcast days make it harder for coyotes to see you and pick up movement but you also won't have the advantage of having the sun in their eyes. If you have to make your stand in direct sunlight, move slower and more deliberately and use a face mask, gloves and camo on your firearm to reduce the chances of an in-

coming predator seeing you. Set-ups in direct sunlight make electronic calls and motion decoys advantageous. Coyotes have a tremendous ability to zero in on the exact location of the sound. I learned this lesson on the first coyote I called in and killed.

Setting up at the end of an old log in a pine forest, I made two series on my old Weems Wildcall. (I know I'm dating myself with that information!) A coyote came around the log in front of me about ten yards away. I stayed motionless until he went past me no more than ten feet to my right. I pivoted on the log to take a shot. The coyote went only ten yards past me before stopping knowing the rabbit should be close. Coyotes have an uncanny ability to pinpoint the origin of sounds. Moving the sound away from you and distracting their attention will give you an advantage.

If hunting with a partner, one hunter setting up downwind of the caller will take advantage of the coyote's tendency to swing that direction. As mentioned earlier, when setting up together, make sure one person can see the downwind. We rarely sit back to back but in flat areas with dense vegetation such as southern forests, this tactic can be effective.

You can't always pick and choose the best weather or area to hunt. And, the best day to go coyote hunting is the day you can. Set-up according to the hand dealt you and make the most of your opportunity.

Good luck and good hunting.

God Bless,

Tim

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