

# Coyote Calling Gear

A few years ago I was fortunate to draw both an elk tag and a mule deer tag. I still-hunted within 35 yards of my four point buck while he fed on buck brush and I dropped my five point bull elk at 75 yards as he left a pine draw and moved onto a scab flat with his cows. Both animals were one shot kills dispatched with relative calm yet both were exciting in their own way. But, when the first coyote of the season came running to my calls, I nearly blew the whole thing as Coyote Fever gripped me!



*A nice coyote with the coyote carrier in place and ready to pack*

What is it about those coyotes? Is it because the tables have been turned and we are now the hunted? I'm not sure but I know that the time I spend coyote calling are some of my favorite times of the year. The thrill of seeing a coyote totally duped and charging to my calls is only surpassed by the old, wary male that we watched for what seemed like forever as he scanned the area watching for any sign of trouble before carefully coming to the call. It's all good and we can do it all winter and even all summer if we choose. No tags. No seasons. No bag limits. This is paradise!

Many articles have been written concerning rifles and loads, calls and callers and techniques for hunting coyotes. But what about the other stuff? What about the rest of the gear that goes along with the sport? Coyote hunting can be as simple or complicated as you choose to make it. And, the good news is a hunter can start at any point he likes.

Two camps exist when it comes to predator hunting gear: the Minimalists and the Gear Junkies. The Minimalists approach the sport with the attitude of "keep it simple" or "make do with what you have". They pride themselves in spending as little as possible and using multipurpose gear from their other outdoor endeavors or gear that they make themselves. The more they can get done with the least expenditure, the happier they are. The Gear Junkie on the other hand, gets almost as much satisfaction from owning and using their gear as they do from actually taking the animal. But, make no mistake about it, any item that might add one more pelt to the truck gets serious consideration. Neither approach is better than the other, but each offers its adherents their own sense of satisfaction.

I personally fall soundly and unashamedly into the middle of the latter category. It's a disease with no known cure and probably stems from a general case of OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder). I love gear. I research it. I test it. I add items and delete items. I upgrade items. If it has the potential to add fur to the shed, it goes with me. Some items go all the time while others are more specialized for specific conditions. It's, well...an obsession. Some things increase my potential for success and others increase my comfort. Still others just add to the experience. Can you hunt predators successfully with a pair of blue jeans, a red plaid jacket, a deer rifle and a closed reed call? Absolutely! Many of us got into the game in exactly that way. But, oh, I like gear!

So, what about that gear? After calling predators on an occasional basis then getting away from it for a number of years, my youngest son, Ben, and I got bit by the bug and jumped in with both feet. (Can you say, "OCD"?) The very first stand

we made together we called in a triple. Ben took his first coyote on that stand—a big, beautiful male—and I was able to pull off a snap shot on a second coyote as it bolted for the sage. After such a tremendous start, we then called in sixteen more coyotes that winter and killed only one of them! The learning curve is steep at times. We learned a lot about stand selection, playing the wind, and coyote vocalizations. But, we also started to learn about predator hunting gear.

We found that sitting comfortably helps you stay still long enough for the coyotes to show up. We learned that the desert provides very few natural rests and a coyote is not that big of a target once the fur comes off. We learned to "Speak the language" and the calls it takes to get that done. We found more appropriate camo clothes that better matched our terrain. We learned that not all coyotes come into the MPBR of our rifles and if they don't, one needs to know how far away they are to have a reasonable chance of getting its hide. We learned that even with the right caliber of rifle, some loads just tear the snot out of a coyote hide. (A topic for another article.) We found that getting coyotes back to the truck along with the other stuff we found "necessary" to tote along is not always easy. In short, we learned a lot about coyotes and started to see the benefit of some other gear to make the hunt more enjoyable and productive. Hopefully some of that experience will help others in their pursuit of Ol' Wiley.

Of all the gear that is available, there are two things that virtually always go with me in addition to my rifle and call. They are a seat and a support for my rifle. A good seat that keeps you comfortable will



*Rare Coyote/Bobcat Double.*

allow you to remain as motionless as possible on stand. It pads your butt and keeps you dry when snow is on the ground. Shifting your weight or scooting to a more comfortable position at an inopportune time has saved many a coyote from losing its skin. The type of seat that works best for you will depend on the terrain and vegetation you hunt. Taller brush or scattered trees allow the use of higher chairs. For instance, in Arizona it's common to use a step ladder to get above the brush and see the approaching predator. If you hunt tall sage, a full height chair can work. In the desert areas we hunt, a simple cushion or ground seat with a supportive back works best. Major Boddicker of Colorado, a minimalist at heart, uses a carpet sample for a seat and it doubles as a barbed wire barrier for crossing fences. In open grassland or broken country, a closed cell foam pad makes a nice shooting mat for the prone position. Predator hunters will find common ground with turkey hunters in this department and swiveling dove hunting stools may also fit the bill for the predator hunter.



*This one rolled to a stop in front of my stand.*

I like a cushion that attaches around my waist or snaps to my belt loop so my hands are free to carry other things, load my rifle, turn on a caller, etc. Most turkey hunting chairs have a strap to carry them over your shoulder. Use a piece of string or nylon webbing to add a sling for your pop-open camp chair or event chair and you'll be good to go. Whatever you use, get comfortable so you can stay still and dry. It will make you a more effective predator hunter.

Shooting aids are getting as common as optics in the field today. They have many different configurations--monopods, bipods, tripods, even quads that look almost like a mini bench rest are available.

Folding sticks, telescoping sticks, and solid sticks are out there. Some sticks are twist

locks, some are cam locks. Solid mounts and detachable bipods abound. Two things are very important here: use one that is quiet and select the right height for your application. It's also very important to use something that is quickly adjustable as to direction and height.

I personally avoid sitting bipods that use springs to hold them in place. They tend to be noisy especially if they contact a rock as you reposition your rifle. I prefer a bipod that detaches while I'm walking to and from my stand. The Stoney Point Rapid Pivot Bipod in the sitting/kneeling height works well for me. It's possible to make quick adjustments to the height of the bipod by kicking the legs apart or rocking the

rifle forwards or back just like using shooting sticks. You can't do that with a rigid bipod. I carry the prone height Rapid Pivot Bipod in a cargo pocket in case I get to my stand and decide to go prone. One last advantage to a bipod over sticks is that they naturally move as one unit with the rifle as you lift it and pivot to line up on an incoming coyote.

As far as choosing an appropriate height for your shooting aid, it may not be as obvious as you may think. The reason is that many stands are on a slope so the hunter can gain a good view of the surrounding country. This requires a slightly longer bipod or shooting sticks than are necessary on flat ground. If a hunter is taller or has a longer torso, he may find that the shooting aid that worked great at the range no longer works as well in the field.

Shooting sticks have two potential advantages over a bipod. One is that your Harris type bipod can be left attached to your rifle while using shooting sticks. And, secondly, the sticks can fall away if you need to get to your feet for a shot at an escaping coyote. The main disadvantage to most shooting sticks is that they have to be moved manually as you lift your rifle to face the charge of an inbound coyote.

If you don't mind a solid shooting stick, you can make a set inexpensively at home. Folding sticks may be handier to carry or to put in a pocket. Again, make sure the height is sufficient for those stands on a slope. The steeper the slope, the more height you'll need. Stoney Point, Bog Pod, Predator Sniper, Vanguard, and many others make quality shooting sticks. Choose or make a set. Unless you are already an accomplished position target shooter, I guarantee your percentage of hits on coyotes will increase exponentially. Leaving my bipod behind is almost as serious to me as leaving my rifle.

Although not as important as the first two items, the use of either a prey or coyote decoy in some circumstances can really increase your odds. Decoys do several things on a stand. Decoys move the predator's eyes away from your position, they confirm by sight what the predator has heard with its ears and, in the case of a coyote decoy, they can illicit a territorial response in a coyote. After reading many accounts of coyote reactions to decoys, I'm convinced that coyotes respond to decoys differently in different parts of the country. Choosing and then using decoys in your area is the best way to find out what works on your coyotes. I have, however, come to some general conclusions.

I firmly believe that the dominance level of the coyote responding to the call will determine to a large extent how they react to a decoy. I have had decoys seal the deal and I have had them scare coyotes away. Big, aggressive moving decoys may intimidate young, subdominant coyotes. I have seen smallish coyotes responding to my call turn tail and leave when they caught sight of the decoy. These younger or more submissive coyotes may have thought that the decoy was actually another coyote that would whip their rear if they got too close. On the other hand, the biggest coyote I ever shot was passing my stand by until he caught sight of the movement of the decoy. He turned and came in on a string to meet my 35 grain Berger bullet. My conclusion? Use a smaller, less intimidating prey decoy unless you know you are targeting dominant coyotes as you may in ADC work.

For the do-it-yourselfer an arrow shaft with a feather tied to the end will work if there is a breeze. Predator Sniper makes a commercial version of this that also folds for carry. Outfoxed Products makes the Whirling Woodpecker decoy that can be attached to a tree limb or a bush. I also like the MOJO Critter. It has pretty radical action but its small size is unimimidating.

Along the same lines as the MOJO Critter, FOXPRO has just released what may be the most advanced decoy on the market--the Jack Attack decoy. I was able to get my hands on one just before my last coyote hunt to test it. The Jack Attack looks similar to the MOJO Critter. (Coincidence? You decide.) The FOXPRO Jack Attack has two significant features setting it apart from the competition. First, it has two speeds and a pause. Fast mode, slow mode and pause can all be remotely controlled. It can be used either with its own stand alone remote or can be controlled from a FOXPRO caller remote when using a cable. The remote allows you to shut the decoy off if you feel it's either scaring a coyote or causing them to respond too fast. (Yes, I believe coyotes can come too fast to the call.) Many other decoys are available. Choose one based your budget and on these criteria to see what works on your coyotes. Again, coyotes can be called without a decoy but in some cases they can add fur to the truck.



*Coyote Carriers in use.*

There are also other items that may find a place in your coyote calling bag. Radios can be a benefit if you call with a partner and don't always sit close enough together to communicate. We rarely talk on our two way radios but we use the vibrate feature to let each other know when a coyote is responding. Ear buds can keep the noise down if you do talk over the radio. Avoid the voice activated microphones. The sound of a hand call or the report of a rifle is best heard from a distance! I only occasionally use radios but, again, there are times they can benefit a pair of callers.

Many, if not most, readers of this site already have a good rangefinder. I use the RF in my Leica Geovids before I start my stand. I'll range some land marks to determine what my sure shot range is after that they don't get used unless a coyote hangs up at a distance. The binoculars themselves are used sparingly until the end of a stand. It's always a good idea to take a look around for the animal on the

fringe of your vision that is holding out. This is especially true when hunting bobcat country. Move slowly while using the binoculars or you'll lose more animals than you gain.

A lanyard for your calls and remote keeps them handy. Separate your calls and remote into layers of clothing or different pockets while walking into the stand to avoid noise. E-caller slings keep your hands free while going to and from your stand or dragging your coyotes back to the truck. Speaking of dragging coyotes, coyote carriers (or 'Yote Totes) and coyote drags can be a real blessing if you either can't skin on the spot or choose not to. Timber Butte Outdoors, Reese as well as others make these. A simple drag can be fashioned out of a five inch piece of ½" PVC pipe and a piece of parachute cord. I only drag my coyotes when snow is on the ground otherwise I carry them out to avoid fur damage.

Coaxers are small, manually operated bulb type calls that produce rodent squeaks with minimal movement. They are used to help pull coyotes in that last few yards for the shot. Your coaxer can be taped to your rifle or attached to your bipod or sticks. Chemical hand warmers can save the day if you're cold blooded or find your shooting glove is better for trigger pulling than it is for warmth. A fanny pack or day pack will help you keep your gear together and organized. My calling duffel stays in the truck and everything I take to a stand goes in my pockets or over my shoulder. This way I can deploy my gear and start calling quickly. The more I stands I make the more coyotes I can call.

The list seems somewhat endless but as the addiction hits and you pursue the sport, you'll begin to assemble your own list of gear. If you like to have the best tools for a given job, your list will evolve as you begin researching, testing, refining and upgrading your gear. Hopefully, the hints here will start you on the right track assembling the ideal gear while saving you some common mistakes along the line. And, hey, there probably is room for one more thing in your stocking anyway!

Good luck and good hunting!

Tim Titus

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