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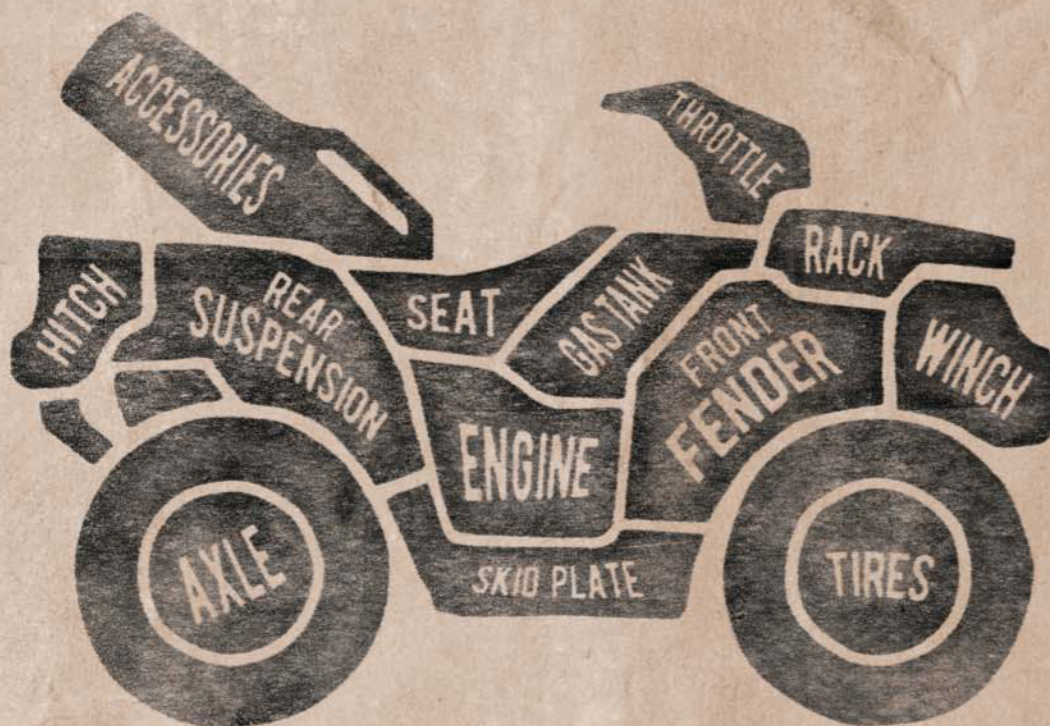


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"AS YOU'RE UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE, *Petersen's HUNTING* is the only national monthly newsstand magazine devoted solely to the subject of hunting. I know many of you are echoing my feelings—that it's about time. Well, long overdue or not, we're here. And being here and first you can be assured that we are going to start and remain the best damn hunting magazine it is possible to put together. A quick glance at the contents page will show that we've put forward every effort affordable to give you, the hunter, the kind of publication you want and deserve."

Editor Ken Elliot wrote that in the first issue of *Petersen's HUNTING* magazine, way back in November 1973. Until that inaugural issue hit newsstands, serious hunters had to get their fix from general interest outdoor publications—think *Field & Stream* and *Outdoor Life*. Sure, those two storied magazines did a decent job, but they were just that—general interest, serving up just as many articles on fishing, camping and the outdoors as they did guns and hunting. Now those two publications are gone, existing solely as digital shells of their former selves. Since 1973, other magazines focused solely on hunting have come along. Most didn't last. But here we are, 50 years on and still the leading authority dedicated to hunters.

For that, we thank our founder, Robert "Pete" Petersen—the media visionary who all but invented the idea of special-interest, enthusiast publications. Petersen was responsible for *Hot Rod*, *Motor Trend*, and *4Wheel & Off-Road*, among other magazines. As much as he was a car buff, Petersen also enjoyed guns. And hunting. After founding our sibling publication *Guns & Ammo*, Petersen decided the world needed a magazine focused solely on hunting.

In everything he did, Petersen excelled to be the best, and for *HUNTING*, he put together a masthead that reads like a hunting hall-of-fame. In addition to Ken Elliot, as editor, that first issue

named none other than Jack O'Connor, who had recently retired from his role at *Outdoor Life*, as executive editor. Listed just below him was Elmer Keith, and the November 1973 issue of *HUNTING* was likely the only time the two old enemies shared space in the same magazine. Other famous contributors to the inaugural issue were Jerry Knap, John Wootters, Jeff Cooper and Norm Nelson, among others.

O'Connor penned an article on hunting bighorn sheep, of course. And Elmer Keith relayed his experiences tracking mighty elephants. But *Petersen's HUNTING* wasn't established just to cater to the well-heeled hunter. Despite his success, "Pete" Petersen was an everyman, and he wanted his publications to reflect that. Those two aspirational articles were followed by stories on shooting rockchucks (a.k.a. groundhogs) in Appalachia, decoying Canada geese over the sagebrush flats of eastern Washington and bouncing bunnies from the brush piles of the Midwest. The issue also included how-to articles on cooking wild game and creating home décor from hunting trophies. And, it saw the debut of the popular *Guns & Loads* column, which has run in every issue of *Petersen's HUNTING* since.

Petersen's HUNTING was, is and will always remain focused on the time-honored tradition of stalking game, furred and feathered alike. This year, we'll be highlighting some flashback content in every issue, and in just a few



months we're printing a special, commemorative 50th Anniversary edition you won't want to miss. I know many of you have been readers since the early days. And we have a lot of new fans as well. I'm glad all of you are along for the ride. I look forward to building on the solid foundation started by Mr. Petersen back in 1973.

I'll sign off by quoting Editor Ken Elliot from that inaugural issue: "*Petersen's HUNTING* magazine is a publication for hunters... Our job is to provide you, the hunter, with the kind of information you want; so let's hear from you."

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Scorn For Social Media

I applaud your “Stop Doing Stupid Stuff” in the December/January edition. Far too many of our fellow hunters have their heads stuck so far up the charging ports of their smart phones they can’t see what kind of damage these posts can cause. I can only hope more people in your profession will bring attention to this stupidity. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see how many “likes” you get for your common sense analysis of a social media problem. Keep up the good work.

GARY AKERS

Warfordsburg, Penn.

I just read your article and completely agree with you on the dangers of social media in our world of hunting. Really great way to point out stupid. I do see the good in social media if used properly. Keep up the great work on the magazine and for old dogs like me who still enjoy the art of print.

TOM GALLAGHER

Via email

“Stop Doing Stupid Stuff” was terrific, thank you for bringing these subjects to our attention. I guess I’m an older hunter now (5.8 decades in age), but for the life of me I cannot fathom nor understand the total lack of respect for our quarry. To add another observation, when did we turn hunting into contests, competitions and games? Total disrespect for the animals God has given us! May one day we will realize the error in our ways.

KENNY MYERS

Mt. Sidney, Va.

I have been pondering the issue of social media posts for some time now. And in fact, I no longer even read any because I am so disgusted about where we have evolved to as supposed hunters. People are hunting for the wrong reasons. Killing for clout and recognition is now dominant. Hunting for self-challenge, interaction with wildlife and spending time in the greater outdoors, not to mention ethical and responsible actions with a hunting weapon, will not get the attention of one's peers. I know there are still many of us that conduct ourselves respectfully in the field, but it is, as you mentioned, this new egotistical crowd that may ultimately be our demise as hunters. We should all reach out to these rogue, moronic, weapon-carrying individuals and let them know that what they are doing is disgusting to most of us and jeopardizing our future of hunting.

I appreciate you speaking out on this troubling subject, but at the same time you are, to some degree, preaching to the choir. Many of the social media crowd, it seems to me, do not read hunting or conservation publications nor do they write. Nowadays it's all about instant gratification and video cameras.

You stuck your neck out addressing this issue and I applaud you for that. *Petersen's HUNTING* has always been on the cutting edge. It is nice to see that it still is.

TIMOTHY BAUGH

Bridgeport, Cali.

FROM THE EDITOR

Stop Doing Stupid Stuff (And Posting It On Social Media)

JUST WHEN I THOUGHT people couldn't be any dumber, this year's hunting season rolls around and proves me wrong. And not only are some hunters doing stupid stuff, but they're documenting it all on social media just for the likes. I call it killing for clout, and if it continues, it'll

Read that last sentence again. Does it sound like a Doomsday prediction? I'm not usually one to make such apocalyptic claims, but man, things have gone from bad to worse recently—war, very war. I think I'm being a bit too reactionary. Let's look at a few examples:

A well-known hunting "colloquy" (God, I hate seeing this wood!) shot a bull elk with a bow. As the mortally wounded elk stood there dying, the hunter decided it would be a good idea to not only video the bull in its final moments, but to record it in selfie mode, with the elk over his shoulder while he smiled and celebrated. The clip was posted to Instagram where it got thousands of views and plenty of comments from other dumb people exclaiming "bocman," "Killer video" and "Sick!"

Another leading member of a very

popular outdoor media brand posted a series of photos documenting the result of a poacher shot: he made with his bow. Instead of hitting the elk in the vitals, the arrow penetrated the ear canal and traveled through the body cavity to, purportedly, "tip the back of a lung." The hunter, who has 255,000 Instagram followers, admitted to taking the shot at a steep crouching away angle, but says the bull lunged at the shot. He never once admits that the bull's subsequent 20 minutes of

suffering might be his fault for taking such a low-percentage shot with a bow. Instead, he was widely praised by his 355,000 syndicated followers for being brave enough to blame the animal for reacting to the shot.

Incidentally, one of the dumbest things I saw on social media this fall was posted by an unknown hunter with just a few followers. Still, it's worth noting just how far hunters will go to kill for clout. On a DTV Alaska hunt, this person hiked for nine "grueling" hours to take a 580-yard shot on his first caribou. After starting to pack

the backstraps, a front shoulder and the bull's nape, he realized he was making the law by not from the field before that. Instead, he was far darker, in grizzly count shelter. With "Gimmie" the SOS button on his mic and was plain the Coast Guard.

Rescued from what But I'm glad my tax to his "Gimmie" spirit.

Now, I wasn't there in grave danger. But a tundra, in relatively nice isn't necessarily deadly. More than a little. But I have done several times—been down and stayed by the side of the time my spirit was an incredibly tough but incredibly rewarding when the mission at hand.

The hunter admitted by Alaska—that the bad news: By no Instagram feed all of disservice, Ucs's have resident caribou have



only hunt for bears and wrongly blaming us for declining bear numbers. Most recently, they were successful in shutting down two huge signs in northern Alaska to nonconservative hunters—banning us from our federal public lands with zero evidence supporting their argument. But now they've got this evidence and more—handed to them on an Instagram-engraved silver platter by dumb, and unethical, hunters killing for clout and posting about it all over social media.

So, you still think social media won't kill hunting? How many more examples do you need?

See you around the campfire.



P.S. There are several organizations working hard to save hunting, including Sports Club International. SCI does more than just celebrate exotic hunting destinations. It also works hard on the local, state and national level to advance hunter's rights here at home, from lobbying lawmakers on important issues to promoting new hunter recruitment and more.

AND PRAISE FOR OUR STAFF

I want to tell you how much I like the new layout approach, exemplified with the "4th Quarter Fowl," "Squirrels & Smoke," "The Trapper and the Prince" and "Treasure Island" stories in the December issue. Kudos to your design editor and staff. Very nice. Beautiful photos and great font usage that make me want to read the articles. I've read outdoor magazines for years, and this is some of the best visual work I've seen. Keep up the good work!

BOB FOWLER

Point Blank, Texas

I thoroughly enjoyed "The Trapper and the Prince" in the December issue. It was a creative work that blended the history of the area with the adventure of a hunt. As a 40-year, big-game hunting veteran, the majority of articles that focus entirely on the hunt itself usually come up a little short relative to providing additional insight or knowledge on the subject. I think many of your subscribers would appreciate more articles in this format.

RAY CARTONIA

Charleston, S.C.

Write us at “HUNTING LETTERS,” 2 News Plaza, Peoria, IL 61614, or email hunting@outdoorsg.com
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The call screams out as the cold nips at ears, eyes, fingers and other susceptible appendages. Usually, we find ourselves in the pursuit of predators and varmints in the dead of winter when all other seasons have passed. A time when snow and frigid temperatures keep others bundled up inside waiting for the first glimpse of spring, but not hunters. We are also predators, striving for a connection with the wild, a freedom that few know. Chasing a predator, of any kind, takes grit and the ability to outwit the most wily and elusive animals. These cold months offer us an opportunity to truly test our skill.

These darkest and coldest of months yield great ad-

venture, but winter is not for the faint of heart. Whether you choose to chase these animals during the day or under cover of darkness, you'll find yourself immersed in a pursuit that requires patience. And fortitude.

Hunting predators is much more than a chance to test yourself, though. It is an important management tool, too. Make no mistake, this pursuit is threatened by those who want to see our lifestyle take its place in history. But the management of these species carries the same weight as the management of the other game species we chase throughout the rest of year. So we brave the cold and test our mettle. —Joe Ferronato



CHÊNE GEAR ZIPPERED KNEE BOOTS

After wearing Chene Gear's waders for a season or two, and falling in love with their ergonomic, comfortable fit, I decided to try their new Zippered Knee Boots this past fall.

The first hunt I wore the knee boots on was to be short, a 30-minute scouting trip for Roosevelt elk in the rainforest of the Pacific Northwest. Six hours and a dead elk later, I was still wearing the boots, and finished the last few miles in a driving rain on muddy trails. My feet stayed dry, and my ankles and soles weren't the least bit fatigued from hauling heavy loads. The soles provided great traction in the mud.

I wore the knee boots on another elk hunt, and several deer and predator hunts throughout the fall and winter. They held up to numerous thrashings by ankle-grabbing briars and sharp sticks and kept my feet warm in the snow.

I also wore them on many waterfowl hunts. One morning I'd finished setting decoys and retreated to the edge of a briar patch to craft a makeshift blind. That's when a piercing feeling radiated through the heel of my foot. Looking at my feet, my headlamp revealed an old 2x4 riddled with rusty nails. I pulled the boot off, only to find the nail didn't pen-

CONSERVATION CORNER



A FIGHT FOR BEARS

WASHINGTON STATE'S unelected fish and game commission recently created a policy that they will no longer support the recreational hunting of black bears in the spring. This de facto rulemaking came during a commission meeting discussing four potential citizen petitions concerning black bears, which was then followed by a "workshop" meant to discuss potential policy outcomes.

The public was invited to submit comments pertaining to the petitions, but at no point did the state insinuate that rule-making would take place, nor did they take comment on potential policies. The commission adopted the policy regardless and, just like that, "recreational" spring bear hunting was removed as a management tool going forward. Such is the current state of politics and wildlife management in the Evergreen State.

The majority of the game commission, which is appointed by the anti-hunting Gov. Jay Inslee, has worked to reverse a century

of wildlife management by advancing the agenda of Wildlife For All—an anti-hunting organization based in New Mexico. Wildlife For All espouses the protection of predators so they can become the primary management tool to control ungulate herds. They pervert "democracy" and "public trust" in the pillars of the North American Model of Conservation to fit their agenda; preaching that hunting as a component of effective management is a bygone era—one that needs replacing by protectionist voices.

Wildlife For All recently held a panel discussion at a national convention of wildlife biologists. They promoted these views, wrapping them in words and images loaded with larger cultural issues and social-justice themes, as the equitable future of wildlife management in America.

Washington state has become the animal-rights stronghold. Predator management has been stymied at every turn—mountain lions, wolves, coyotes and black bears have all had a turn at favoritism and protection. The Biden administration now wants to add grizzly bears to the state's landscape. The lack of credentials to serve

on the state's fish and game commission is part of the blueprint to end hunting in every state. The more commissions that animal-rights or protectionist advocates can serve on, the more the Humane Society of the United States, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Project Coyote and numerous other anti-hunting organizations can control predator hunting. All of which, of course, impact ungulate herds and tag allocation.

Spring bear hunting in Washington is gone for the foreseeable future. The commission will undoubtedly target another predator season to regulate next. This, however, isn't a Washington problem. It is a problem for every hunter in every state. Washington state is just the most recent and visible fight. These same fights are taking place nationwide—likely in your state, right now. It's past time hunters, all hunters, started paying attention to game commission meetings and how those commissioners are selected. We can turn the tide, but only if we meet the enemy on this new battleground and make our voices heard loud and clear.—*Brian Lynn*

etrate the 7mm inner sole I'd put in, an extra that comes with the boots to fill in for half-sizes. It was tender for a few days, but no broken skin and the nail hole never leaked.

The side zippers work great with performance pants, rain pants and even bulky, insulated bibs. The rubber gusset behind the zipper keeps you dry and makes for easy on and off. The 3.5mm all-neoprene boot is warm, comfortable and doesn't overheat.

I look forward to wearing Chêne's knee boots this winter and into turkey season.—*Scott Haugen*



BULLET BOARD

BULLET BASICS

Designed as a fast, light hunting option for the .22 Long Rifle, the Stinger hits hard and expands a lot—for a .22. Featuring a copper wash to minimize lead deposits in the bore when pushed to 1,640 fps in rifle barrels, the little bullets are expensive, but are considered one of the best killers in the .22 LR realm. Cartridge cases are plated with naturally lubricious nickel to minimize reliability-reducing tarnish and corrosion.

TESTING GROUND

Here's where this recovered bullet is unique. A friend used to carry CCI Stinger ammo in his tiny North American Arms Black Widow model revolver while hunting mountain lions behind hounds all winter. Who knows what the muzzle velocity was from the 2-inch barrel, but it sure wasn't 1,640 fps. This bullet was used on a mature male lion in the 150-pound range.

CCI Stinger 32-grain .22 HP



FIELD PERFORMANCE

My houndsman friend put the little Stinger hollow point through the lungs just behind the cougar's shoulder. On impact, it leapt from the tree, ran 50 yards or so and dashed up another tree. After a few seconds, it died and dropped to the ground.

STATS

It's a testament to the Stinger's design that even at low velocity from a very short barrel, it still mushroomed beautifully. Penetration was an estimated eight inches. Recovered weight is 28.4 grains, or nearly 89% of original. Mushroomed diameter averages 0.37 inch, or 1.65 times original.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

You may consider a .22 underpowered for mountain lion. However, government hunters commonly use it and the .22 Magnum. Here's why: A bullet from a powerful cartridge often knocks the cat out of the tree and into the pack of hounds below, where flying claws and teeth can wreak havoc in the seconds before the animal dies. When shot through the lungs with a .22 bullet, many cats simply grab on to the tree and hang on until they die and fall.—*Joseph von Benedikt*



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RIFLE: Weatherby Mark V .257 Weatherby



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TRAIL CAMERAS FOR PREDATORS

A concerned landowner recently called, asking if I'd help him with a cougar issue. I set out multiple trail cameras and five days later, checked them. The next morning, I shared several video clips with him.

Caught on camera were four cougars—a female with three young—a pack of four coyotes and other single sightings, loads of gray fox, a bobcat, two skunks, three raccoons and a small black bear. The landowner had trouble believing all those predators were on his ranch, and in such a brief time. The neighbors sorted out the cougars that started killing domestic goats; I helped with the coyotes.

For years I've run trail cameras for predators. What I would have given to have such tools when I was a kid, running my own trapline in the 1970s, and 20 years later when I lived in Alaska. —*Scott Haugen*

1 GO LOW & VIDEO

When setting trail cameras for predators I hang them lower than for big game and always run them on video mode. Being a former high school science teacher with a biology degree, I'm eager to learn all I can about wildlife. A 10-second video clip reveals a great deal more information than a single photo, or series of photos. The predator interactions, sounds and behaviors you capture on video will greatly surpass what you'll see when in the woods. Predators are secretive animals, and trail cameras are a great silent eye.

I hang trail cameras one to two feet off the ground and point them straight down trails. This allows extended videos to be captured that reveal the exact direction animals are moving, how fast they're traveling, how many there are and what demeanor they're exhibiting. Avoid pointing cameras into trails at a 90° angle because quick-moving predators can be missed.



2 TRAIL CAMERA PLACEMENT

I'll also position trail cameras on the ground beneath logs, smack in the middle of a trail, and capture animals jumping over the log. I'll set cameras pointing down the length of fallen trees and catch predators traveling atop it. On one log I've caught multiple cougars, gray fox, bobcats, raccoons, even a coyote that sought refuge on it while being chased around by an irate doe protecting its fawn.

If two trails intersect, hang two cameras on one tree, each pointing down a trail. Predators often travel in straight lines, so positioning one camera pointing down a game trail, the other down a fence line or timbered-edge trail, will ensure you don't miss anything.



3 TRANSMIT IT

If immediate predator control is the goal, consider using transmitting trail cameras that send a photo directly to your cell phone in real time. If looking to call in a cougar or pack of coyotes, this allows you to head afield as soon as possible, increasing the odds of success.

I run over two dozen trail cameras—year-round—and what I learn from the hours of footage captured has made me a more effective predator hunter. It's also elevated my level of understanding and appreciation for predator-prey relationships in the wild.





BOLT ACTION RIFLE SYSTEM

S O L U S



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OUT
THERE



In The Predator Pit

—THE EDITORS



A good seat is of utmost importance when getting set up to call predators, but it also needs to deploy quickly and transport easily. Lucky Duck's **Predator Seat** checks both those boxes, and more. This small folding chair features a lightly padded footprint measuring 16 inches by 16 inches, has an adjustable back, clips to easily secure the seat in the folded position, shoulder straps for easy transport and even a pocket on the back of the seat to carry calls and extra gear. \$60; luckyduck.com





Close-range, quick-acquisition shots occur frequently when predator hunting, and sometimes a shotgun is the perfect weapon for a set. Apex's **Predator** 12-gauge loads feature high-density TSS pellets that help maximize lethality. The shells—offered in 4, 2 and BB shot sizes—have more pellets due to the high-density materials, improved pattern retention and increased terminal performance at longer distances to help hunters capitalize on any shot opportunity presented. *\$45-\$69; apexmunition.com*



A sit in cold weather can be easily cut short when your hands go numb. Kuui's **Northstar Glomitts** keep your digits warm in the coldest conditions. Featuring a mitt with a separated index finger to improve dexterity—along with a small hole to free your trigger finger—these gloves are heavily insulated with Primaloft, and are fully water- and windproof. The gauntlet-style cuff allows you to seal the opening over your jacket while the Pittards leather palm offers excellent grip and durability. *\$139; kuui.com*



Whether you're hunting for fur or fun, a quality varmint round will improve your next predator hunt. Winchester's **Varmint X** bullets expand rapidly and are incredibly lethal. The polymer tip enhances long-range accuracy and promotes expansion, while the thin alloy jacket and lead core are designed to explode and fragment in the body cavity. Available in seven popular predator-hunting calibers from .17 Hornet all the way up to .243 Winchester. *Prices Vary; winchester.com*



In a world run by electronics, it's nice to keep it simple and use analog equipment. The Primos **Double Cottontail** predator mouth call features two metal reeds that are designed to make a high-pitched raspy sound imitating a prey in distress. Whether you use it as your primary call or as a closer to draw hung-up dogs those last few yards for a shot, it is a tool that is worthy of adding to your kit. *\$28; primos.com*

Handheld Exterminator

Walther's new WMP is a tack-driving .22 Mag. pistol capable of taking down any varmint.



The WMP is built for performance, fitting well in the hand, functioning reliably and packing the punch needed to dispatch pesky varmints.

As I've said in this column before, there are few things more useful in the outdoors than a rimfire handgun. They're portable, easy to shoot, relatively quiet and can be invaluable when it comes to controlling pests. My usual choice for this role is a .22 LR revolver, which works well, but there are times when that simply isn't enough gun—dispatching trapped feral hogs being one example. Sure, I could move up to a larger and more powerful centerfire, but in doing so, I would lose some of those virtues. How about a lightweight, easy to carry handgun that bridges the gap between a .22 and a .357 or .45? I think I've found just such an animal.

The Walther Magnum Pistol, better known as the WMP, is a polymer-framed semi-automatic handgun chambered in .22 WMR. Famous for its classic PPK and P38 pistols, this storied German firm has really stepped up their handgun game in recent years, producing centerfire models such as the PDP that take a back seat to no one. These guns are well-designed, built with typical (excellent) German quality, durable and reliable. The WMP is one of the newest handguns in the company's lineup and, to me, one of the most interesting.

The .22 Magnum has significant advantages over the .22 LR. Not only does the magnum rimfire achieve significantly higher velocity, it also offers a far more diverse selection of ammo. Polymer tipped bullets like the V-Max are available, as are hollow points, jacketed hollow points and full metal jacket options. Where legal, it can be a viable choice for predators, varmints and the like. I've used the .22 Mag. for head and neck shots on more feral hogs than I can count and it is effective so long as the correct bullet is used.

With a 4-inch barrel, a typical .22 LR revolver achieves a muzzle velocity of around 1,000 fps. The WMP averaged 1,417 fps with the Remington Premier Magnum Rimfire ammunition that we had available. That is a significant boost in velocity and energy which, combined with more aerodynamic expanding bullets, gets you a flatter trajectory and devastating terminal performance. I've been hitting the raccoon population on our farm pretty hard in hopes of increasing our turkey and quail populations—and to break up the monotony of the off season.



WALTHER WMP

Type: Semi-automatic pistol

Caliber: .22 WMR

Barrel: 4.5 inches

Weight, empty: 1 pound, 11 ounces

Capacity: 15+1

Grip: Molded polymer frame

Finish: Black anodized aluminum

Sights: Fiber-optic front, serrated black rear

Trigger: 4.5 pounds

Price: \$549

Website: waltherarms.com



The WMP is ideal for this task, making hits out to nearly 100 yards feasible.

The WMP is a full-size handgun but, since it is not designed to be carried concealed, its size is a nonissue. The .22 Magnum cartridge is quite long, nearly as long as a .38 Special, which translates into a larger grip and longer slide cycle. Despite its size, the WMP is light—weighing only 29 ounces fully loaded with 15+1 rounds thanks to its polymer frame and aluminum slide. Comparing apples to apples, it is shorter, narrower and with a comparable weight to most .22 revolvers and has more than twice the capacity—not to mention more power and reach.

For the lefties out there, the WMP is fully ambidextrous. There are four magazine releases on the gun, one on each side of the frame and on either side of the trigger guard. There is a slide stop on both sides of the frame as well. The polymer grip's textured surfaces are extremely grippy and the same treatment is applied to the frame where the support-hand thumb is likely to rest.

FEEDING THE BEAST

Semi-automatic rimfires—both rifles and pistols—can be finicky about what ammo they like. The Walther WMP is no different. While we had success with most of the ammunition we tested, there are some loads it liked more than others. Walther is very upfront about this and even did extensive testing with all .22 WMR ammo on the market to ensure WMP owners get the most from their pistol. You can find this data on their website, but here's a brief list of what we've been feeding our WMPs:

CCI Maxi-Mag 40-grain Varmint

Federal 45-grain Punch

Remington 40-grain Premier Magnum

Hornady 45-grain Critical Defense

Give me good sights and a good trigger, and I can hit with a handgun. The WMP has great sights; a highly visible, orange fiber optic up front combined with a serrated black rear. It's also fitted with a decent 4.5-pound trigger. This combo makes for great shootability. This gun is ridiculously fun. You get an impressive fireball at the muzzle, but recoil is essentially nonexistent. The sensation is like that of shooting the FN 5.7 (5.7x28mm), at a fraction of the ammo cost. From the bench, I determined that the WMP is capable of outstanding mechanical accuracy as well. Adding an optic, which is simple given the optic-ready slide, would even further enhance its capabilities. So much so, that I think that the WMP would be a viable choice for prairie dog shooting.



Walther has long been known for making reliable firearms, and the WMP is no exception. Built on a full-size frame, with magnum power, avid outdoorsmen can take it into the field with confidence.

The WMP isn't the first semiauto .22 mag pistol on the market, but it is probably the best-built gun available. It is also the first one that I've used that is truly reliable. Given the increased pressure of this round, getting .22 Mag. handguns to cycle can sometimes be a challenge for engineers. I put quite a few rounds through our test sample and found it to be 100% reliable with the ammo I had available.

At my core, I am a handgunner. Maybe I read too much Elmer Keith as a kid, but few things give me more pleasure than hitting small targets at distance with something that can ride on my hip. Handguns are also practical—you can carry one just about anywhere. In places where bears and other potentially dangerous animals aren't likely to be encountered, the WMP would be an excellent choice as a farm/ranch/trail gun. In a pinch, it could do double-duty as a defensive sidearm. 🛡️

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The Great Debate

When it comes to effectively dusting fur, which is better: bolt action or semiauto?

An accurate semiauto chambered in a cutting-edge cartridge such as the 6mm ARC, pictured here, makes a very capable, hard-hitting predator rifle.



In the cult-like world of serious predator hunting, there are certain truths. Yet some are contrary: Small holes in fur are better than big holes; but a big hole in a dead coyote is better than a small hole in a wounded—and escaped—coyote. Verbal wars about the best cartridge and bullet have raged for a century.

Less controversial, but perhaps more important, is your choice of rifle. Are you better served with a bolt action, or a semiauto?

Each type has strengths, and each has weaknesses. Which will work best depends largely on the type of hunting you do. Let's unpack the pros and cons of each, along with some subjective characteristics that can be the deciding factor.

BOLT-ACTION PREDATOR RIFLES

Turn-bolts are the traditional choice. Historically, bolt actions are more accurate than semiautos. When dumping coyotes from 400 yards is required, precision is crucial.

Although there's a lot of bleedover from varmint rifles, with enormously heavy barrels and bulky stocks, a proper predator rifle will provide stellar accuracy without being so heavy it's a pain to pack. Get a sleek Browning X-Bolt or Tikka T3x or Ruger American, top it with a not-too-big scope, and you'll be able to carry it all day and shoot into tomorrow.

Reliability in frigid weather is another strength of the bolt action. Ice in the action? No problem; muscle through it, crushing the ice. Chamber that round and kill that coyote, fox or bobcat.

Bolt actions have one other advantage: They're compatible with just about any and all cartridges. Whether you want a tried-and-true fur-flopper such as the .22-250 or a cutting-edge wildcat like the .20 VarTarg, you can have it.

In the modern world, though, there's one area where bolt-action predator rifles just can't keep up with semiautos, and that's firepower. If you need a fast follow-up shot (or thirty), a semiauto beats the bolt action every time.

It's not that you can't achieve quick follow-up shots with a bolt gun, but it's a process. You've got to release your firing-hand grasp; acquire a grip on the bolt handle; function the bolt handle up, rearward, forward and down; reacquire your grip, find the trigger and squeeze.

With a semiauto there's just one step to getting off another shot: Squeeze.

My personal go-to bolt action for furbearers is a light-weight custom rifle chambered in 6mm Creedmoor. It's built using a Defiance Anti-X action, a Proof Research barrel and stock and a Timney trigger. I shoot 105-grain Berger factory ammo or handloaded 110-grain Hornady A-Tip bullets in it, and it's absolutely outstanding for predators at extreme range. It's hard on fur, but when putting a coyote down with authority is paramount, it's a sledgehammer.



When accuracy and reliability are paramount, bolt-action predator rifles rule. Shown is the author's custom 6mm Creedmoor, which has tremendous reach and puts coyotes down with profound authority.

SEMI-AUTO STOPPERS

At the risk of offending all you "other" semiauto rifle owners out there, I'll stick my neck out and state that only AR-15s qualify as serious predator rifles. Unless, that is, you live in and only hunt big-thicket country where shots past 60 or 70 yards don't occur. Then, a Ruger Mini-14 or the like can serve.

Why only AR-15s? Because they are the only semiauto rifles that regularly approach bolt-action levels of accuracy. Only ARs have a design that allows the barrel to be effectively free-floated—and that fact makes all the difference. If you're going to perforate the tobacco-can-sized vitals of a distant fox, you need a rifle that shoots tobacco-can-sized groups at 400 yards. With all due respect to everything else, ARs rule the semiauto accuracy realm.

Sufficient AR snobbery established, let's consider the real advantage of a semiauto for predator hunting: fast follow-up shots. Absolutely nothing short of napalm (or, if you have an NFA tax stamp, a full-auto firearm) can pour on the fire like an AR.

Now, that can be good or bad. I've seen hunters blaze away with reckless abandon, no regards to careful shooting, and waste

half a 20-round magazine educating a streaking coyote. On the other hand, I've seen a deliberate second or third shot dump an old song-dog skulking away—deliberate, but still much faster than even the best bolt-action shooter could achieve.

How about disadvantages? Often overlooked is weight. ARs are made mostly of metal and, as a result, can be surprisingly heavy. They don't have to be, though. A premium AR-15 with skeletonized and titanium parts can weigh shy of seven pounds. But most are closer to eight. Stack a robust scope in tactical-grade mounts atop it, bolt on a bipod and stick a full 30-round magazine in, and you'll have a predator rifle that can serve double duty as an admirable boat anchor.

If you want to hunt with an AR, get one that's intentionally built light. Put a moderate-size scope on it. Low-light



USE A SUPPRESSOR

Until you've seen how effective a suppressor is at taming recoil, which enables the shooter to make fast follow-up shots, and how it minimizes the instant escape reaction of many predators, it's hard to comprehend.

Getting a suppressor is a hassle, yes. No one is arguing that. However, it's absolutely worth it. And the longer you wait, the longer, well, you'll wait. Do some shopping, pick a suppressor and get your eForm application started now. There's no better place to shop than Silencer Central.

Look for a suppressor that's light, say 14 ounces or less. You also want compact dimensions, ideally no more than six or seven inches in length. And finally, although a QD system is intriguing, a direct-thread suppressor costs less, weighs less and is more consistent in accuracy.

performance and fast target acquisition are more important than magnification anyway. Cut back on rounds and use a 10-round polymer magazine. The result will be a sub-eight-pound rifle that you can pack all day, shoot accurately and shoot fast.

Reliability with ARs can be an issue. Most of the modern makers have the historic glitches associated with AR-type rifles worked out. However, snow and ice can still cause them to hiccup. Just be protective of your AR. Keep the moisture and mud out, and it'll keep running for you.

My last peg against AR-type rifles—and indeed all semiautos—is limited cartridge compatibility. Now, this is largely a thing of the past, since a double handful of very capable AR-perfect coyote cartridges has been introduced in the past decade. You still can't have a .220 Swift, but you've got great cartridges such as the 22 Nosler, .224 Valkyrie and 6mm ARC to pick from.



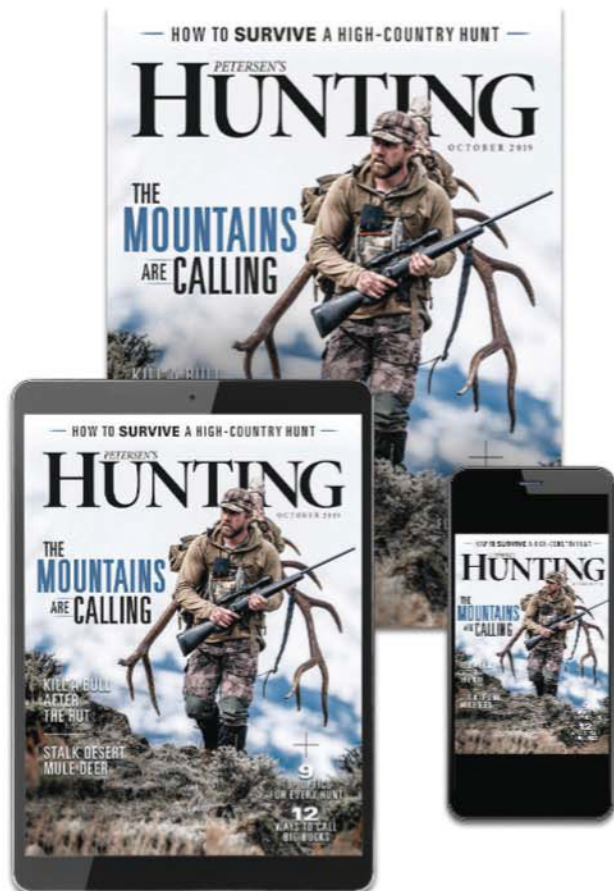
A well-built AR-15 can rival bolt-action accuracy. This sub-half-MOA group was shot with factory .224 Valkyrie ammo.

Plus, of course, there are no knocks against the traditional 5.56/.223 Rem. cartridge for use on predators. And for those serious about collecting fur, the speedy little .204 Ruger works well in AR-15 rifles.

My personal go-to AR for predators is a wonderfully light custom version that I built at home, using components mostly sourced from 2A Armament and Proof Research. Clad in Kuiu Verde camo, it blends well into predator habitat. It's chambered in 22 Nosler and shoots 50-grain Ballistic Tip bullets into bug-hole groups.

THIS OR THAT?

Which is better—bolt action or semiauto—boils down to how you're going to use it, and the type of encounters you anticipate. No rifle can cover every potential situation, but both are pretty versatile and the good news is this: Both bolt-action and semiauto rifles have been walopping coyotes effectively for longer than most of us have been alive. Pick whatever appeals to you most. ⓘ



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The Dead Of Night

Testing Pulsar's top-of-the-line thermal scope.

Do you need a thermal riflescope that likely cost more than your first car? No. But after testing the new Pulsar Thermion 2 LRF Pro, I can unequivocally say you're probably going to want one. Before you put me on blast for even suggesting anyone should spend several mortgage payments on a riflescope, understand the market for thermal hunting optics has exploded in recent years. There are a lot of hunters spending this much, and more, setting up dedicated rigs for hunting predators, hogs and other nocturnal varmints. No, it's not for everyone, but for the avid few, the Thermion 2 is worth considering.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I mounted the Thermion on a CZ 600 Trail, a bolt-action platform rifle, in .223. With a Silencer Central Banish 30 screwed on the front, the setup makes an excellent truck gun for night work. The Thermion is heavy, coming in at 2 pounds, and bulky thanks to the brick-like laser rangefinder sitting atop the objective bell, large turrets that aren't actually turrets (more about that later) and a three-button control pod on the ocular lens. But then, this isn't supposed to be a mountain-hunting rig you're going to lug all over, so the heavy weight doesn't bother me.

Once you get used to the controls, running the Thermion is intuitive. With so many options available via the "quick" menu, including both photo and video capabilities, as well as selectable thermal display and reticle modes, I do suggest spending a lot of time with it in the daylight before fumbling around after dark. The instruction manual is a bit lacking, but there are many videos and other tutorials available online that are a big help. The menu is easy to navigate by pressing the left turret and using it to scroll through all the options. The right turret has a USB port to recharge the internal battery, while the top turret houses a removable, rechargeable battery. Pulsar



The Thermion 2 weighs in at 2 pounds, due to all the features that are packed into the optic—including an onboard rangefinder.

says both batteries should offer approximately 10 hours of run time, though that's optimistic as my unit started giving me low-battery indications around half that.

Sighting the Thermion 2 LRF Pro is incredibly simple, requiring just a single shot. Once you've got an impact point, you simply navigate to the Zeroing interface on the menu and move a small X on the display to the hole in the target. Once you save the new reticle position, you're zeroed at your chosen distance, though I would shoot a second time to confirm the impact. There is one hitch, however, with sighting in a thermal optic in the daylight: You need a warm target to aim at. I've heard people suggest using disposable handwarmers or heating up a steel target with a blowtorch. But the best solution I found is folding a sheet of aluminum foil into a square and centering your crosshairs on that.



AFTER DARK

Once the sun went down that first evening, and it got dark, I stepped out my front door to see if the Thermion 2 was worth the hype (not to mention the cost). Scanning the surrounding fields, I was surprised to see a coyote standing not far from the house. The scope doesn't transmit an image through glass like a standard optic. Instead, you see a digital representation on the 1024x768 AMPLD display screen inside the ocular housing. The 640x480 with NETD <25 mK sensor provides exceptional detail. I was expecting to see the white thermal signature of an indeterminate animal. Instead, I watched a coyote mousing across a field almost as if it were daytime. (And speaking of mice, the sensor is so sensitive, you can pick up the signature of mouse at a surprising distance.) Pulsar claims the sensor can "see" a heat signature up to 2,000 yards away.



Thermal optics allow the user to hunt a variety of animals that have nocturnal habits.

One of the biggest challenges of hunting at night is determining distance to target. Because the thermal displays a two-dimensional image on a screen, it's very difficult to judge any sort of depth-of-field. I was so surprised by that first coyote, I forgot to use the built-in rangefinder and instead shot well over the dog's back, thinking it was much farther than the 200 yards it actually was. The Thermion 2 LRF's built-in rangefinder, along with the industry-leading sensor and display, is what adds both cost and value to the thermal optic. A quick push of the RF button on the top of ocular housing delivers accurate range to target out to 875 yards. A scan mode also reads multiple targets as you sweep the scope across the landscape—very handy when shooting at a group of wild hogs.

One of my favorite features of the Thermion 2 is the picture-in-picture display option. While the display quickly zooms from 2-16x, focusing on a second close-up image of the target in a separate window at the top of the display increases the shooter's ability to accurately place the crosshairs on the vitals.

The Thermion 2 features both camera and video options—pretty cool for hunters looking to document their hunts. To be honest, I was too awed by all the nocturnal animal activities I've been missing to really mess with this function, but the photo/video button is close at hand should you choose to do so. And from the crystal-clear images and video I've seen taken with the thermal optic, the resolution is of the same high quality you'd expect.

THE TAKEAWAY

From the moment I spotted that very first coyote, I was addicted. Several more nights patrolling the farm—and finding a lot more varmints than I thought I had—solidified the idea of adding a thermal optic to my arsenal. My main reason for getting a thermal scope to test was to eliminate some problem coyotes preying on our chickens, but it would take a lot of eggs to justify the cost of this particular model. There are less expensive options on the market (including several from Pulsar). But, for hunters who are serious about hunting at night, whether for predator control or just because it's incredibly exciting, you can't do much better than the Thermion 2 LRF Pro. ⓘ



ZACHARY HEIN

A

week into riding the high seat on a Land Cruiser around South Africa and one happily falls into the routine—quiet conversations with eyes ever scanning for game while subconsciously ducking and sliding out of the way of the hypodermic-like acacia branches longing to exact a toll. The camel thorn's lesson is painfully taught and, once paid, not easily forgotten.

At a diesel's idle we crept down the sand road, Mata Mata's owner Harry Claassens behind the wheel. Talking with my companion, I leaned towards him as yet another ligneous tax man stretched to catch me by the neck. With no warning given, I nearly lost my seat as Claassens stomped the brake pedal to the floor. Looking below me, I watched as he pointed near vertically and calmly stated, "Mamba."

Following his finger to the branches in front of my face, the slow churn of my relaxed brain settled on an alien figure suspended at eye height mere feet away. I hadn't fully processed what I was seeing when the truck launched backward at speed, sliding to a stop just five yards away.

My internal monologue immediately went morbid. "Man, Kipp is going to feel terrible when I die to a mamba on safari!"

At the time, Kipp Oertle ran the CZ-USA Custom Rifle Shop, coordinating rifle builds for customers embarking on any number of once-in-a-lifetime trips—especially those needing an accurate and reliable firearm without dropping a lifetime's worth of spare change.

In the month leading up to my first hunting trip abroad, I had chatted with Oertle several times a week about all things Africa. Stuck in the office back in Kansas City and carrying a bit of jealousy for my two-week adventure, he nearly always signed off with a tongue-in-cheek, "I hope you get bit by a black mamba!" Good friend, that fellow.

He could feel rather safe with his remarks, considering I was heading to South Africa's Green Kalahari in the middle of its winter. With morning temperatures dipping into the low 20s Fahrenheit, the odds of running into a snake of any kind should have been zero.

"Do you have your shotgun?" Claassens shouted over his shoulder. "Grab it!"

Claassens and my host Kevin Steele piled out of the front bucket seats while the cameraman and I scrambled down from our elevated bench, me with my well-worn CZ over/under in hand. Taking two steps out into the sand, Claassens was already at my shoulder. From the ground, the storied serpent looked much smaller and anything but intimidating.

"When you get a clean shot at his head, you take it. If he comes down, he'll come fast."

The words barely left Claassens' mouth when the mamba made its move. With lightning quickness, it doubled back on itself and dropped like a shot. A split second later it was again at eye level with me. With a reputation for aggression and



Sean Delonas

carrying extremely toxic venom, it's no wonder the mamba holds the distinction of the most feared snake in all of Africa.

"Don't miss" was all I could think of as the shotgun made landfall on my cheek and shoulder at the same time.

Well-worn may describe my go-to 12 gauge, but well-loved would be much more appropriate. The first over/under shotgun I purchased upon finding gainful employment, it was a field gun built specifically to be lightweight and was appropriately named the Upland Ultralight. It tips the scales at less than 6 pounds and is well-balanced to boot. I ruined some of that when I had a gunsmith add a spacer and pad to bring it to my preferred length of pull. Short barreled and quick in the hand, it had proven an indispensable tool chasing Kansas pheasants and quail and was the obvious choice to accompany my plains-game rifle since it didn't contribute a great deal to the weight of my already-over-packed rifle case.

The little shotgun had already gotten quite a workout on this trip, with midmorning visits to water holes and cattle catch pens that resulted in doves and sand grouse aplenty. It had also delivered my first ever double-double on game birds, helping me drop four sand grouse with two consecutive shots—something that cemented sand grouse hunting as the most enjoyable wing-shooting I've ever had the pleasure to participate in.

With the instinctively pointing shotgun solidly mounted, the snake's head suddenly appeared perfectly framed in the void between two branches. I gave him the bottom barrel and pellets caught him an inch behind the jowls, nearly severing the dangerous maw from his body. In spectacular fashion, gravity and his still-pumping heart rapidly drained his blood to the sand.

We watched in relief as the snake quickly died. With a hearty clap on my back, Claassens stepped up to the tree and retrieved the lifeless body, holding it aloft to peer through the gaping holes left by the individual pieces of shot that had attempted to disembowel the serpent's head.

"What the heck did you shoot this thing with?"

"Well, number 4 buck—we shot up all the 8s on doves yesterday!"

With a chuckle, Claassens laid the snake's length on his tailgate, producing a knife to sever the last strands holding head to body. Retrieving two sticks, he pinched the head between them and walked off into the desert sand.

"Where's he going?" I asked Steele.

"To dig a deep hole. We wouldn't want an animal or person to somehow step on that thing, even if it is dead!"

Steele and I worked to skin the slender carcass, debating the merits of barbecued mamba and had just rolled it up when Claassens returned.

"We've never had mamba, what are the chances we could throw this on the braai tonight?"

Claassens leaned in, grabbed the slender stick of white meat by the tail and deftly slung it out into the sand.

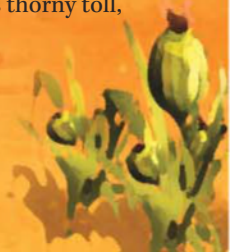
"Not a chance. I'm happily married, and if I bring that back to Jolané's kitchen I will be looking for a new place to sleep tonight."

Dejected, but riding an adrenaline rush, I asked Claassens what would have happened if the mamba had bitten me as we passed by its thorny throne.

"Well, you'd probably survive. But it'd be the worst month or two of your life."

In reality, it would all depend on the speed with which we could find treatment. Effects of a black mamba's venom become apparent quickly, with blurred vision and a metallic taste coming on within ten minutes then a downward spiral of symptoms culminating in collapse after 30-45 minutes. Without treatment, death is a distinct possibility within 7-15 hours.

Oblivious to these particulars, but intensely relieved to have benefitted from Claassens' keen eyesight, I climbed the short ladder to my canvas-covered bench. As the diesel fired and we slowly churned forward through the soft sand, I couldn't help but look at the already-dried pool of blood at the base of the acacia. Though I had avoided its thorny toll, the tax man did not go unpaid. 





December 1973
Flashback

death of a cattle killer

*Varmint calling can be more than mere sport;
it can establish a working relationship between
rancher and hunter.*





by
John Wootters

The thing happened exactly as it might have in a hokey Hollywood melodrama, so help me! One minute the whole herd of cattle was bunched tightly all around us, milling and mooing nervously as they often do at the sound of a predator call. Then, as if on cue, the herd began to part, the nearest animals first and then the rest stepping to right and left, opening a corridor toward the setting sun. And, as the last cow stepped aside, there stood the killer!



All we needed to complete the melodramatic effect was a drum roll and a distant flourish of trumpets. Instead, we got a single sharp crack from Murry Burnham's .244 to ring down the curtain.

The scenario had begun a few days earlier when the famed, varmint calling Burnham brothers of Marble Falls, Texas, and I had met at the south Texas home of a mutual friend, rancher Willie Esse, Jr., for a few days of predator calling sport. Our primary purpose was photography, rather than shooting. That part of Texas is largely devoted to large scale farming and cattle raising, and the ranchers pay little attention to the healthy and howling population of coyotes which abounds. In other parts of the state, where the principle agricultural industry is raising sheep and Angora goats, the ranchers feel more threatened by the singing of coyotes on moonlit nights and devote large amounts of time and money to efforts to control—if not to exterminate—the little prairie wolves.

For all these reasons, plus the fact that we find it a lot more difficult to get a good photo of a coyote than to shoot him with a rifle, the Burnhams and I were armed with telephoto lenses and color film when we arrived at Willie's country home. Our host had arranged for us to have access to a nearby ranch of more than 16,000 acres on which the landowner is careful to preserve the natural wildlife balances. The predators—coyotes and bobcats—are never trapped or poisoned, and, not surprisingly, the deer population is healthy and heavy-horned. The owner was happy to have us since we didn't intend to even carry a gun.

Also available to us, thanks to Willie Esse, were several thousand other acres in the vicinity which are owned by him and his family. And it was in one of these pastures, we learned, that the killer coyote lived.

Willie brought the subject up soon after our arrival.

"Reckon you boys could call up and kill one certain coyote for me?" he asked.

Winston, Murry, and I, in chorus, allowed as how we thought we could, if he could give us some information on the critter's habits. All of us there, including the rancher, knew that a cattle killing coyote is a rarity. Biologists who have studied the coyote's dietary habits say that domestic livestock makes up only a small percentage of the average coyote's grub. They say, further, that much of what mutton or beef does show up in coyote stomach contents analyses is found and eaten as carrion, rather than actually killed by the coyote himself. However, certain coyotes do turn "rogue" and do great damage to livestock, often seeming to kill for the sheer pleasure of slaughter and failing to eat any portion of their victims.

One wool-growing friend of mine near Del Rio, Texas, was once afflicted with an old three-toed bitch coyote who, by actual tally, killed more than \$2,000 worth of lambs in a spree that lasted two months. Her distinctive tracks marked every kill, and when the rancher finally managed to trap her, the depredations ceased.

There are many other documented cases of rogue coyotes, enough that not even the most ardent coyote lover can deny that occasional animals can become intolerably destructive. Even so, a rogue who preys on calves and beef cattle is extremely uncommon, simply because such ani-



Utilizing the rancher's knowledge, Winston and Murry Burnham discuss the day's plan to take a rogue coyote. The key to success, on this kind of a hunt, is knowing your quarry's habits and habitat better than he does.

mals are too much trouble for the little wolves. Jackrabbits and other rodents, not to mention the wide variety of fruits and vegetable products eaten by coyotes, are usually so much easier to get that coyotes need not face a sharp-horned mother cow to get a meal. We questioned Willie about this, but he reported that the region had enjoyed good rains, rabbits were flourishing, and the local coyotes, far from starving, were fat and sleek. The cattle killer, it seemed, was indeed a rogue, a coyote criminal, as it were, with abnormal habits and behavior. Not only had Willie lost some young calves to the beast, but he promised

to show us evidence that the coyote had attacked full grown cows. I'm a ranch owner and cattle raiser myself, and I knew Willie was right when I saw cows with bobbed tails and a quarter of an udder torn out by the wolf's slashing teeth.

The assumption that a single coyote, or, at most, a female with her young-of-the-year, was responsible was based on the fact that only one of the several herds owned by the Esses in that part of the county had been victimized, and that all the attacks had taken place in a single small area, yet the entire county has plenty of coyotes.

The varmint caller's equipment consists of a rifle, a good call, camouflage clothing and, of course, the varmint. Successful varmint calling requires practice and when done properly will make the shooting relatively easy.



To the rancher's credit, Willie had not been stampeded by his losses into an all-out extermination campaign against all the coyotes on his land. I have seen such campaigns and they're sad to watch, with dozens or even hundreds of coyotes poisoned to make certain that the single destructive individual was stopped. By the same logic, all the members of a human criminal's family might be executed to be sure of getting the right person.

Instead, our host challenged us to prove our claim that the proper use of a predator call can be selective enough to nail the rogue, quickly and surely. I'd been able to perform this service for other

place to place, remaining no more than 15 minutes at each spot. For the remainder of that day and half the next, we never failed to draw at least one coyote into camera range with our calls for 16 consecutive stands. All told, we called up 51 coyotes and two bobcats in three and a half days, and that counted only those animals which came within camera range.

Our technique never varied, and we followed all the rules for daytime predator calling. The three of us wore full camouflage, including face-nets and gloves, and we were careful to approach each calling location upwind and with a minimum of disturbance or exposure. We never sky-

lined ourselves on the way to a stand, or crossed large open areas. Once on the site, we communicated only by hand signals, each selecting a bush or small tree against or behind which we could sit so that we would show no distinctive human outline. We never sat together, always choosing spots 20 yards or so apart, preferably with the sun behind us and facing the areas from which we expected coyotes to come. We were blessed with clear, calm weather, so we did not need to use skunk essence to give olfactory camouflage downwind. Murry did the calling, using the long-range call which he and Winston manufacture, and the care we took to get into a position unobserved paid off time and time again when we got a coyote in our faces after only one or two squeals on the call. The Burnhams and I have long agreed that the "when" and "where" of predator calling, plus the careful approach, is vastly more important than the "how" of actually producing the ersatz cry of a jackrabbit.

We were fascinated, if not surprised, that a ranch with such an incredible coyote population has never had trouble with livestock destroying animals, and boasts one of the finest herds of white-tail deer, including some tremendous bucks of near-record proportions. As the manager said, "After all, the coyotes and the deer lived here together for 10 million years before mankind showed up. I guess if coyotes could hurt the deer herd, there wouldn't be any whitetails here now!"

By noon of the fourth day, we'd pretty well blanketed the entire 16,000 acres with the sound of Murry's calling and had made

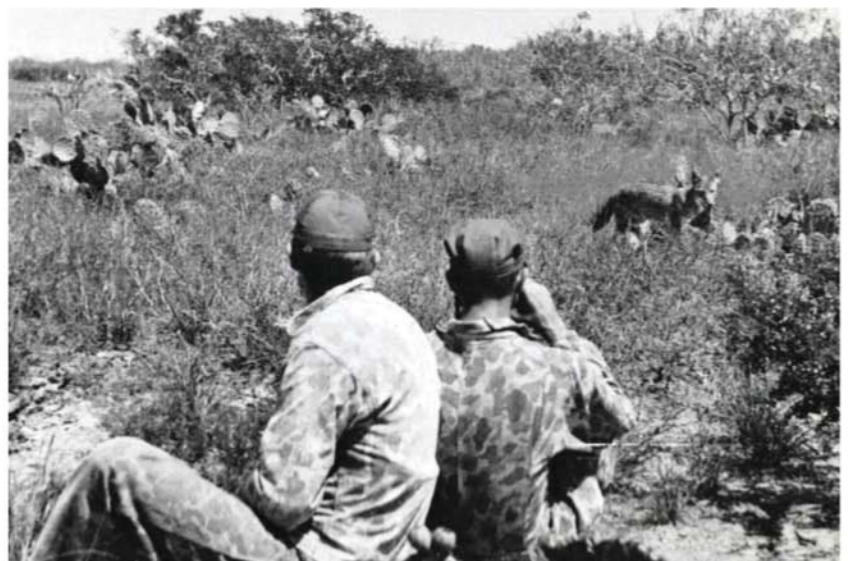


A cattle killing coyote is a rarity. Biologists who have studied his dietary habits say that domestic livestock make up only a small percentage of the coyote's grub.

ranchers around Texas, and I was certain that it could be done, but I had my doubts about the limited time available to us for the project. We'd planned to spend at least three of our four days calling on the 16,000-acre ranch for photographs. Nevertheless, we confidently assured Willie that his rogue was as good as dead.

The action started at sunrise next morning, and it started with a bang! At our first calling stand on the big ranch, with the ranch manager for a witness, we called up 10 coyotes and one bobcat within 10 minutes. In my twenty years of varmint calling, I had never seen such a spectacle, although I have called as many as eight predators at a single stand on two occasions, both of them at night. We had coyotes swarming around us like bees, on all sides, and hardly knew which animal to try to photograph first. I burned up a full 36 exposure roll of 35mm color film during those few minutes. And, although that kind of action obviously couldn't sustain itself, it didn't cool off much as we moved from

The coyote, pictured below, just could not stand the tempting sounds emitted by the pair of hunters and was lured in to easy shooting range; not uncommon when varminting.





The rifles used in varmint hunting vary almost as much as the hunts themselves. A couple of the more popular are the Remington Model 40X and the Winchester Model 70. Both come in varmint models and in all the more popular calibers.

At their first calling stand the author and his companions were able to call up to ten coyotes and one bobcat within ten minutes; fantastic even for seasoned veterans.

more than 350 exposures with our 300mm lenses. That brought us up to Willie Esse's business at hand, the elimination of his cattle killing rogue. The first step was scouting the terrain in order to locate the one exactly right place from which to call. Willie drove us across his pastures and pointed out where the attacks on his cattle had taken place. Most of the surrounding country was rolling, open grassland, interspersed with small patches of dense, thorny brush. Esse thought he knew which of these thickets the cattle killer lived in, and after looking over the countryside we agreed that he was most likely right. With binoculars, we swept the edge of that brushline from a distance, and finally found what we needed a pile of logs and brush pushed together by a bulldozer when the pasture was cleared, about 40 yards out in the grass from the thicket. We could approach the pile unseen by circling to take advantage of a long hill, and then keeping the brush between us and the thicket for the last hundred yards. We decided to stake everything on one try, and call this spot just at sundown, at the best possible time of day.

With only a half hour of shooting light left, Murry and I donned our camouflage clothing and made our approach, bending low and duck-trotting the last few yards to escape any wise coyote eyes which might be watching from just inside the dense brush. Gaining the pile, we quickly settled into positions from which we could watch in all directions and snicked cartridges into our rifle chambers. Murry was carrying a Remington autoloader chambered in .244 and mine was a custom-built bolt action using the identical 6mm Remington cartridge, with handloads driving the 75-grain Nosler bullet close to 3,400 feet per second.

As I set the safety latch on the rifle, Murry began calling; immediately, the cattle in our end of the pasture reacting,



trotting toward the sound on a massed front. Cursing silently, I could only hope the killer would come from my side, which was not blocked by the cow herd, or that Murry would by some miracle be able to get in a shot through the herd if the animal showed up from his side.

The squeals continued to pour out into the quiet evening. Minute after minute went by, and our light was fading fast. I knew this coyote we were after was a psychopathic animal; would it react normally to the call? As the light dimmed, I kept thinking of Willie Esse, watching with binoculars from his truck a half mile away, waiting to see the "experts" materialize his killer out of the brush as if by magic. I probed the edge of the thicket with my eyes, straining for the slightest movement. But there was none; we'd blown it. The rogue was not going to be taken so easily, and we had to go home tomorrow.

Then, with only a minute or two of light by which to shoot remaining, the cattle herd began to part, rolling to right and left like a wave beginning close to us and at last opening that corridor at the end of which stood the coyote!

At Murry's shot, the animal collapsed, and the cattle galloped away. We continued calling for the few remaining minutes of light, but nothing else appeared. We

walked out to examine the dead coyote and found it to be a medium-sized female with no obvious deformities, injuries, or sickness. There was no way we could be sure that this was the particular animal we'd sought. Only time would tell.

Two months later, Willie Esse was in my home city of Houston and called to report that he'd had no more attacks on his cattle. We'd done it! With a little know-how and the judicious use of a predator call, we'd nailed one particular criminal coyote, and thus possibly spared dozens of others from a poisoning campaign to which Esse might have been forced if his losses had continued. Which meant that there would be plenty of sport for us with a varmint call any time we liked.

All this took place about 15 months ago, as this is written. Just the other day I was talking to Willie Esse on the telephone, scouting for some good mourning dove hunting, and he reminded me of the cattle killer. "Sure," I said, "I remember; I was afraid we weren't going to get her for you."

"Well," he went on, "I've got another coyote bothering my cows, for the first time since you and Murry killed that one for me. Wonder if you could find time to come down and call it up and kill it?"

I only wish more ranchers were such capable judges of talent! 🐾



|| ADVENTURE HUNTER

CHASING ADVENTURE ON THE OPEN ROAD

What happens when you hit the road and chase adventure in a kitted-out Mercedes Sprinter van? *AdVAnTure Hunter* hosts Jim Kinsey and Brandon Nelson share the untold stories and unforgettable moments they experience on their travels across America. It's more than a road trip. It's a way of life.

MONDAYS
8:30 ^P_{ET}

SPORTSMAN

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

WELCOME TO THE DARK SIDE

KEVIN REESE

NIGHTTIME IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR PREDATOR HUNTING.

WALKING THAT serpentine trail just after sunset nearly 15 years ago seemed surreal, even haunting, as the colors of day were rapidly veiled in the silver hue of moonlight. By the time I climbed into my treestand to survey the ground below, night had fallen. The wooded lot, teeming with game trails, suddenly became little more than a faint, shadowed mystery. Even more mysterious were the sounds—nighttime bawls, calls, screeches and growls lacking any semblance of familiarity.

As haunting as that first experience was, the oddly contrasting mix of adrenaline, mystery and peace night hunting provided only served to pique my interest in more post-sunset adventures. Not usually one to be afflicted by addiction, I certainly needed more experiences like that first hunt and through the years have continued to seek out such opportunities. Truth be told, most of my hunting adventures over the past 15 years have begun with a setting sun. While others are walking out, I am heading in.



Hunting at night requires the right setup. Once equipped, though, there's no better time for predators.



Chris Krueger

PREDATORS: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Believe it or not, even raccoons are small predators and are quite popular prey among night hunters. Though most of us are after more notable predators like coyotes, bobcats, cougars, foxes and even feral hogs. Yes, you read that correctly. While hogs scavenge for grubs, acorns, agricultural crops and more, they are also opportunistic predators hunting down eggs, mice, rabbits, newborn game animals and even other pigs.

While feral hogs are plentiful in my region of the U.S., so are coyotes, foxes and bobcats. Obviously more notorious in the predator world, coyotes enjoy meals of small pets, newborn calves and wildlife like fawns, as well as small game. Cougars, bobcats and foxes wreak similar havoc on livestock and wildlife although the latter focuses more on small animals, birds, eggs and more. All are huntable in most states, including at night—check your local hunting regulations.

PREDATOR CONTROL

Day or night, it's tough to beat the peace and serenity of our outdoor world. In our modern, pressure-cooker world, flanked by our everyday business, connecting to our heritage and the calm nature offers has never been more important. That said, while we obviously play vital roles in wildlife conservation and habitat preservation, we are also stewards of our environmental and agricultural resources. Although the two motivators of traditional hunting versus predator eradication are quite different, essentially falling into two distinct methodologies, they do share a bit of common ground.

While traditional hunting is generally about successfully taking a single animal, eradication is about population control—removing as many destructive species as possible, most often with semiautomatic modern sporting rifles. Calving season is prime-time coyote hunting for many ranchers. The wild canines, considered “least concerned” with respect to endangered species, wreak havoc on newborn calves, costing ranchers dearly. Putting America's coyote hunting population in perspective, an average of 400,000 to 500,000 are killed annually. Even so, their population continues to grow and coyotes inhabit every state except Hawaii.



Chris Krueger

Coyote populations continue to rise despite nearly half a million animals being taken annually.

Adding to the predator list, foxes call nearly every place throughout North America home—out of dozens of species, only a few are protected. With more than 3 million roaming from coast to coast, bobcats also are listed as “least concerned” by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Feral hogs also are problematic with the nationwide population estimated at more than 6 million. They are now reported in at least 39 states and four Canadian provinces and continue to grow in numbers and distribution. In my home state of Texas,



Being of nocturnal nature, coyotes are bold at night, leading to increased success for hunters.

feral hogs number roughly 3 million and biologists suggest we must eliminate 70% of the population annually to keep growth at bay—that’s not likely to happen anytime soon. Feral hog damage in Texas is estimated at more than \$400 million annually. Adding insult to injury, they compete with indigenous wildlife for habitat and always win. As a result, eradication-style hunting has become increasingly popular among hunters who understand the stakes and there is no better time to pursue them than when they are most active—nighttime.

STILL AND STAND HUNTING

As the name implies, still-hunting means moving carefully, staying quiet and waiting out shot opportunities. Most often,



Hogs are opportunistic predators that often feed on various animals, including other hogs.

still-hunters are after a single animal and if the prey is an opportunistic predator such as a feral hog, it’s quite a bit like deer hunting—locate pinch points, water sources, food supplies, merging trails, etc. Determine wind direction, then set up down wind and wait. Of course, the same setup would be employed for coyotes, foxes and other predators; however, shots on these wary critters are often little more than chance opportunities. Moreover, hunters after such predators are not likely to still-hunt anyway unless they have established some semblance of routine visits through scouting.

With respect to eradication on a still-hunt, this is generally reserved for hog hunting. Hunters lay in wait over baited sites or actively rooted areas and when the moment of truth arrives, do their best to take down as many as possible.

COMING TO THE CALL

A calling setup, also commonly called a stand or set, is the most common and most productive predator-hunting strategy, especially for coyotes and foxes. Setup location is your greatest advantage. Every spot of ground you choose should offer a vantage point while also shielding you from sight—nighttime certainly helps but moonlight can work against you. Hearing and scent are also issues. Keep quiet (calling being the exception) and use the wind.

Like daytime pursuits, nighttime call setups are temporary. If nothing responds in 20 to 30 minutes, move to another location and try again. Often, I do not move more than a couple of miles, and when I see action, I stay put.



Chris Kreiner

When used properly, e-callers can help you find success on nighttime hunts.



The Foxpro Shockwave comes with 100 quality sounds and has two speakers to maximize output.

My most productive calling routine is the same, day or night, and usually begins with electronic coyote howls or yips—sometimes a bit of a mix. These are great locator calls that also play on territorial behavior. Soon after, I shift gears into coaxing predators with any easy meal, using distressed rabbits and pups as my go-to choices. I use an electronic call like the Foxpro Shockwave for louder calling and quiet things down with mouth calls. A close-range call like Burnham Brothers' MB-1 Mini Blaster is a great choice and the company has developed an industry-first ultrasonic call designed to pull in call-shy coyotes.

SPOT AND STALK

For eradication-style feral hog hunting, the most effective strategy is nighttime spot and stalk. Using changing elevations, vantage points are as important in stalking as they are in calling setups. Trek high and scan below. In Texas, many of us glass tens of thousands of acres of open, flat crop fields with thermal monoculars capable of detecting heat signatures from a mile away. As hunting's

general rule, always play the wind when approaching. Wear dark clothing, especially during a full moon—bright clothing and even casting shadows in bright moonlight can ruin a stalk. Most often, we set up to shoot once we are within 100 yards. Where more than one hunter is on a firing line, a 3-2-1 countdown, whispered at low volume, can be used to effectively eradicate a herd.

GEAR UP!

Night hunting is not for everybody. Some of those unfamiliar, haunting sounds may not be for the faint of heart and trekking long distances over darkened, uneven terrain takes some grit. Even then, taking confident, ethical shots, whether with a bow or rifle, is a skill that should be practiced until perfect. Hell, even staying awake and focused from dusk 'til dawn can be challenging. Of course, while grit is great, equipment choices and tactics can make or break a hunt. Along with a trauma/first-aid kit, here are some equipment suggestions designed to leverage your nighttime hunting success.



Using a bow at night requires the right equipment, just like this enlarged peepsight.

RIFLES

For traditional style hunting, bolt-action rifles are most popular, followed by semiauto and lever-action firearms. Great caliber options for coyotes and foxes include .223 Remington, .22-250, 6mm ARC, 6.5 Grendel, 6mm Creedmoor and 6.5 Creedmoor. For feral hogs, I prefer 6.5 Grendel, 6.8 SPC II, 6.5 Creedmoor, 7.62x39, .300 AAC, .300 HAM'R, .308 Winchester, .350 Legend, .338 Federal, .450 Bushmaster and .458 SOCOM. For most of my personal predator hunting, I carry an AR-15 or AR-10 semiautomatic rifle topped with a thermal optic.

ARCHERY

When I tell people 90% of my bowhunting is from dusk to dawn, their responses are a mix of shock and confusion followed by, "How the hell do you bowhunt at night?"

It's about bow setup. I hunt with a compound bow and employ a combination of accessories designed for low-light adventures. From the rear forward, I use a larger peepsight, 3/16- to 1/4-inch, a bow sight with fiber-optic pins (my personal sight is an HHA King Pin), a rheostat sight-light designed to only illuminate pins and a high-intensity red or green LED



light or laser illuminator that mounts in the bow's stabilizer hole, preferably with a remote pressure switch. My current light system is a Sniper Hog Lights Bow Light with a red LED. Additionally, illuminated nocks are a must to watch arrow flight and for quicker, easier animal recovery.

OVERNIGHT OPTICS

The perfect optic setup for hunting at night includes an optic for surveillance and a dedicated optic for your rifle. While many do fine with colored LED light systems and laser illuminators, demand for digital 24-hour scopes, digital night vision (NV) optics, generational NV devices and thermal imagers has exploded. Price points for these types of optics run the gamut, from \$500 for a 24-hour digital riflescope, including digital night vision modes, to \$6,000 - \$10,000 for today's most popular flagship thermal riflescopes. Where night hunting includes inherent dangers posed from wildlife and other hunters in your midst, I suggest using a handheld scanner as well as a firearm-mounted optic. My go-to night hunting optics include a Pulsar Helion 2 XP50 Pro Monocular and Thermion 2 LRF XP50 Thermal Riflescope. Both boast an adult-size heat signature detection range of 2,000 yards. ⓘ



OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS

JOE ARTERBURN



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PETERSENSHUNTING.COM | MARCH 2023

A SEASONED COYOTE HUNTER GOES BACK TO SCHOOL



SITTING WITH ME in the classroom—a meeting room at the Hampton Inn in Scottsbluff, Neb.—are John Fleming of Illinois and Mark Lawrence and his wife, Penny, of Missouri. We've come to learn about coyote hunting.

Geoff Nemnich is at the whiteboard diagramming reasons coyotes respond to a call—hunger, curiosity, territorial, social/parental—and then matches the three categories of sounds he uses for each situation, drawing solid or dotted arrows from prey, coyote vocals and coyote sounds.

Then he slipped in a “Nemnich nugget,” as he is inclined to do. Don't be afraid to mix up sounds, jumping from category to category, as many as four or more sounds at each stand; just make sure you cover all three sound categories and all four triggers.

I've hunted coyotes for decades and read dang near every book on coyote hunting I could find, plus books on coyote biology, behavior and mythology. I religiously read magazine articles on coyote hunting, any kind of predator hunting and have written a few over the years. I've hunted with world-champion coyote callers and predator hunters who were predators themselves—always listening, watching and learning.

And I'll be doggoned if Nemnich's Coyote Craze College didn't fire up the learning process again. Sure, I knew the basics of what triggers coyotes at certain times and generally when to use

what type of sound, but I'd never seen anyone give it enough thought to literally draw a picture. It was a Homer Simpson “Doh!” moment.

KILLER CREDENTIALS

After four years in the Marines, Nemnich, now 43, earned a marketing degree through the G.I. Bill, spending free time, about 40 days a year, during his college years hunting ducks, geese, deer and coyotes. He entered a few calling contests, liked the challenge and decided to get as good as he could.

“I knew the only way to get really good was to give up hunting the rest of the stuff and take my 40 days and spend 38 of those hunting coyotes,” he said.

Devoting 95 percent of his hunting time to learning coyote hunting through trial and error paid off. He won back-to-back titles (2014, 2015) at the World Championship Coyote Calling Contest and hasn't slowed down. He filmed hunts and produced the popular Coyote Craze coyote-calling DVD series, and he co-hosts The Last Stand series on YouTube and hosts the Eastman's Predator Pros podcast. Since 2011, he's booked everyone from novices to veterans at this Coyote Craze College, which includes a knowledge-intense classroom day and two days of putting the knowledge into practice in the Nebraska Panhandle, where Nemnich grew up. (That's why classes are limited to three participants, so everyone fits in the pickup. Classes



Geoff Nemnich and Mark Lawrence wait on the first stand of the day as the sun comes up.

sell out; book early.) The lawn care business he started during college grew and he's still at it. The mid-March to mid-October work schedule happens to fit his coyote-hunting plans.

John Fleming, 58, is two years older than Mark Lawrence. He's a deputy sheriff looking forward to hunting more coyotes when he retires. He's hunted coyotes with a buddy for about four years, but not hard. Lawrence has been hunting coyotes for about five years in Missouri and is good at it; he killed 95 last year. (Nemnich, who hunts from early fall through February, usually kills 200 by Christmas and another 100 by the end of February.) Lawrence is here to fine-tune skills and, in particular, learn how to deal with call-shy coyotes, survivors educated from previous experiences responding to a call. "That's my No. 1 priority," said Lawrence. "Trying to get those coyotes to come in that someone else has screwed up or I've screwed up."

"Unfortunately," Nemnich said, letting him down gently, "I don't have a secret sound for you."

Those call-shy coyotes might not be educated at all, Nemnich said. Many hunters assume every coyote is identical and reacts the same way.

"That's a misconception. If you hunt long enough you realize all coyotes are not the same. Some are naturally little wuss coyotes, and some coyotes are

naturally more aggressive from the day they were born."

In a nutshell, coyote calling is "the process of making an educated guess based on the numerous variables involved," Nemnich said. With so many variables, among them wind, weather, terrain, time of year, time of day, an area's carrying capacity, hunting pressure and coyote behavior, Nemnich's goal is to control every aspect he can to be as efficient as possible. That means attention to detail.

"Killing efficiency is important," he said. "I take pride in killing efficiency, meaning very, very, very few coyotes that come into the call leave, ever. That is a contest mentality. You're only going to get X number of opportunities in a day, so we must make every one count."

Sure, he said, everyone is going to miss some shots or screw up a stand now and then but by understanding coyotes and how they respond to a call, plus giving yourself the best possible shot with a carefully planned stand, the closer you can lure them and the more relaxed, the less wary they will be, which "all relates to putting more bullets in coyotes."

Here are some of the topics he covered.

GET GOOD AT MATH

A trotting coyote travels at about 10 mph, meaning it can cover a mile in six minutes. Since most yotes respond from



Nemnich sets his Lucky Duck call in position.

less than two-thirds of a mile, about 1,000 yards, and even less in rough terrain or thick cover, a responding coyote can be at your location in four or five minutes, or less. Nemnich has a "Probability of Calling in a Coyote" chart based on time spent on stand.

The probability is highest from two to eight minutes. "I base all my times off that, meaning if I play a sound the coyote liked it should be able to show up—very few come from a full mile, but if they do, it should still take only six minutes," he said. And that's at a slow trot. Those that run in will be faster than that; in three minutes those coyotes should be on us."



Geoff Nemnich explains his diagram outlining the categories of coyote-attracting sounds and how they relate to reasons coyotes respond.

First, each sound category can be cataloged on an aggression progression, less aggressive to more aggressive, for instance: Prey distress sounds like a rodent squeak, baby cottontail or deep

coyotes out there include everything from the timid wusses to “big smart-ass coyotes wanting to fight,” he said. “My goal is to open your mind to how all these sounds work and what we’re trying to accomplish when we play these different sounds,” he said. “You need to find a recipe you like; that’s suited for what you do.” He thinks the secret sound, if there is one, will be by overlaying one sound, say an aggressive fighting sound, over a prey-distress sound. “Experiment,” he said. “And remember, just because they hear it does not mean they will come in, for whatever reason.”

And when it comes to decoys, Nemnich won’t bother using one, unless it’s attached to the call.

HEARING

Coyotes hear four times better than humans and at higher frequency which

His calling strategy is to switch sounds to cover each of the triggers he charted earlier. At a typical stand, he’ll alternate sounds at three-minute intervals. If it’s early in the day and the terrain is wide open, meaning coyotes may travel farther, he may use three different sounds changing at five-minute intervals.

He plays a minimum of two different sounds at each stand, many times three or four, but never more than five minutes for any one sound. Another example: Sound 1 for three minutes; sound 2 for five; sound 3 for three; and sound 4 for three minutes, so he’s been on stand for 16 minutes, which is his max. Then it’s on to the next stand. Do you allow time between sounds? Lawrence asked. “No,” he said, “It’s bam, bam; one sound after the next. To me if the sound is off, you’re wasting time.” He believes if you turn off the sound that is drawing him in, you’re opening the door for something else to catch his attention.

Don’t overcall your area; play sounds at just enough volume to cover an estimated range—another variable you determine from topography, weather, etc.—and do not overreach and alert coyotes in the area you’re going to move into next.

THE SOUNDS

We wanted to hear about specific sounds, perhaps still seeking that magic never-miss combination.



Geoff Nemnich inspects the second coyote of the day.

growling jackrabbit. Coyote vocals such as a lone pup howl, female interrogation howl, lone female howl, high-pitched single howls, deep male howls, pair howls and multiple coyote howls. Coyote-based sounds like a squeaky pup distress, baby coyotes yipping, female whimper or breeding sounds, then coyote or raccoon fights.

Of course, there are a lot of other sounds, but you get the idea where they fit. Nemnich, using Lucky Duck electronic calls, starts his stands with less aggressive sounds and finishes with the most aggressive. That gives him the chance to call every potential dog out there, knowing

is why many electronic callers have tweeter speakers to better project high-frequency sounds. “One of the only constants in coyote hunting is this,” Nemnich said. “If they don’t hear it, they will not come. So, I always err on the side of being too loud with my call. Many do just the opposite, fearing calling that is too loud will scare away coyotes. I want to make sure every ‘yote heard my call. Whether or not they come is up to them.”



John Fleming, Joe Arterburn and Mark Lawrence pose with three coyotes at the end of the day.

SMELL

After early experiments with cover scents (He and his buddy sprayed each other with fox urine and had a memorable experience during the truck ride home. “We couldn’t wash that out of our clothes for a long time,” he said.) and scent-killing soaps and sprays, he doesn’t bother with them anymore. He just plays the wind, setting up to get a shot before coyotes can get to the downwind scent stream. He doesn’t worry if you splashed gas on your boot while fueling; he doesn’t even care if you smoke on stand. “I couldn’t care less because wherever our human scent is going,” he said. “The gas scent, the cigarette scent, it’s all going the same exact spot and if a coyote gets there, whether he smells human odor, gas, whatever, it’s game over.”

THE USE OF MAPS

For Nemnich, the onX Maps app has replaced GPS and plat-ownership and topographic maps, allowing him to determine property ownership and boundaries, mark promising hunting areas while scouting, plan and track routes and potential stands, determine distance between stands, as well as

keep notes on individual stands and, via satellite images, review topographical features. He also notes dates he’s hunted each stand, and can add photos, property owners’ phone numbers, gate codes and other information.

COYOTE LIFE CYCLE

In February, as female coyotes are going into heat, coyote population is at its lowest. In April, when pups are born, the population is at its highest, but they are in the den; and a few die of disease or other causes. Then, three or four months later, when coyotes start out on their own, the number of callable coyotes is highest. By September and October, those young coyotes are on their own and there’s a huge spike in callable numbers. October through December hunting is on, and numbers start to go down. In January most other hunting seasons are over and more hunters are out, and the population continues to take a hit. Then the cycle begins again.

THERMAL HUNTING

In Nemnich’s way of thinking, a coyote killed at night with thermal optics is

worth half a daytime coyote. It’s naturally easier. In the dark you don’t have to hide as carefully on approach and on stand. You don’t have to walk as far from your vehicle, meaning you can make more stands. Coyotes naturally move at night, and are more willing to cross open areas in the dark. “But,” he said, “it’s a different skillset. You have to get good at it.”

Nemnich uses two identical rifles—Daniel Defense Mk12 in .223; Gemtech Sandstorm suppressor; Sig Optics Sierra6 BDX 5-30x56mm for daytime; Full Moon Optics Genesis 75 thermal scope for night—so the feel, operation and performance are consistent.

In the day-long session, Nemnich covers coyote hunting soup to nuts, as they say, including all the variables that make each stand a unique experience; more than we can cover here and a lot to soak in. Fortunately, he provides a workbook so it’s easy to review what you learned. Mine is covered with notes in the margins.

But now class is dismissed. For the next two days, we hunt coyotes. 📍

For more info: coyotecraze.com

Scientific Discovery Stuns Doctors

Biblical Bush Relieves Joint Discomfort in as Little as 5 Days

Legendary “special herb” gives new life to old joints without clobbering you. So safe you can take it every day without worry.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 54 million Americans are suffering from joint discomfort.

This epidemic rise in aching joints has led to a search for alternative treatments—as many sufferers want relief without the harmful side effects of conventional “solutions.”

Leading the way from nature’s pharmacy is the new “King of Oils” that pioneering Florida MD and anti-aging specialist Dr. Al Sears calls “the most significant breakthrough I’ve ever found for easing joint discomfort.”

Biblical scholars treasured this “holy oil.” Ancient healers valued it more than gold for its medicinal properties. Marco Polo prized it as he blazed the Silk Road. And Ayurvedic practitioners, to this day, rely on it for healing and detoxification.

Yet what really caught Dr. Sears’ attention is how modern medical findings now prove this “King of Oils” can powerfully...

Deactivate 400 Agony-Causing Genes

If you want genuine, long-lasting relief for joint discomfort, you must address inflammation. Too much inflammation will wreak havoc on joints, break down cartilage and cause unending discomfort. This is why so many natural joint relief solutions try to stop one of the main inflammatory genes called COX-2.

But the truth is, there are hundreds of agony-causing genes like COX-2, 5-LOX, iNOS, TNK, Interleukin 1,6,8 and many more—and stopping just one of them won’t give you all the relief you need.

Doctors and scientists now confirm the “King of Oils”—Indian Frankincense—deactivates not one but 400 agony-causing genes. It does so by shutting down the inflammation command center called Nuclear Factor Kappa Beta.

NK-Kappa B is like a switch that can turn 400 inflammatory genes “on” or “off.” A study in Journal of Food Lipids reports that Indian Frankincense powerfully deactivates NF-Kappa B. This journal adds that Indian Frankincense is “so powerful it shuts down the pathway triggering aching joints.”

Relief That’s 10 Times Faster... and in Just 5 Days

Many joint sufferers prefer natural solutions but say they work too slowly. Take the best-seller glucosamine. Good as it is, the National Institutes



*The active ingredient in **Mobilify** soothes aching joints in as little as 5 days*

of Health reports that glucosamine takes as long as eight weeks to work.

Yet in a study published in the International Journal of Medical Sciences, 60 patients with stiff knees took 100 mg of Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for 30 days. Remarkably, Indian Frankincense “significantly improved joint function and relieved discomfort in as early as five days.” That’s relief that is 10 times faster than glucosamine.

78% Better Relief Than the Most Popular Joint Solution

In another study, people suffering from discomfort took a formula containing Indian Frankincense and another natural substance or a popular man-made joint solution every day for 12 weeks.

The results? Stunning! At the end of the study, 64% of those taking the Indian Frankincense formula saw their joint discomfort go from moderate or severe to mild or no discomfort. Only 28% of those taking the placebo got the relief they wanted. So Indian Frankincense delivered relief at a 78% better clip than the popular man-made formula.

In addition, in a randomized, double blind, placebo controlled study, patients suffering from knee discomfort took Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for eight weeks. Then the groups switched and got the opposite intervention. Every one of the patients taking Indian Frankincense got relief. That’s a 100% success rate—numbers unseen by typical solutions.

In addition, BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal) reports that Indian Frankincense is safe for joint relief — so safe and natural you can take it every day.

Because of clinically proven results like this, Dr. Sears has made Indian Frankincense the centerpiece of a new natural joint relief formula called **Mobilify**.

Great Results for Knees, Hips, Shoulders and Joints

Joni D. says, “**Mobilify** really helps with soreness, stiffness and mild temporary pain. The day after taking it, I was completely back to normal—so fast.” Shirley M. adds, “Two weeks after taking **Mobilify**, I had no knee discomfort and could go up and down the staircase.” Larry M. says, “After a week and a half of taking **Mobilify**, the discomfort, stiffness and minor aches went away... it’s almost like being reborn.” And avid golfer Dennis H. says, “I can attest to **Mobilify** easing discomfort to enable me to pursue my golfing days. Definitely one pill that works for me out of the many I have tried.”

How to Get Mobilify

To secure the hot, new **Mobilify** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-341-7197 TODAY**. “It’s not available in retail stores yet,” says Dr. Sears. “The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer.” Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Mobilify**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I’ll send you all your money back.”

Use Promo Code **PHMB223** when you call to secure your supply of **Mobilify**. Lines are frequently busy and due to heightened demand, supplies are limited. To secure your supply today, call **1-800-341-7197**.

A CHANGE OF SEASONS

MARK KAYSER

WINTER IS NOT THE ONLY TIME TO CALL COYOTES.



PREDATOR HUNTING has been a winter pursuit since the value of fur became known to humanity. Just rewatch *Jeremiah Johnson*, which illustrates the economy and lifestyle fur held in our early history. Furs reach their prime by late fall and hold their value well into the winter.

Unfortunately, the fur market has lost traction in the modern world economy. Primarily driven by politics, this renewable resource does not have as many end users, decreasing the importance of fur. It may come back, but I wouldn't hold my breath.

On the other hand, predator-hunting interest has exploded in the past couple of decades. A whole new category of rifles has emerged at sporting goods stores, in addition to aisles of products dedicated to the pursuit. I recall modifying my grandma's 1970s Remington model 700 into a coyote-style rifle back in the 1980s. Today, I have no less than three rifles set up specifically for predator pursuits.

More hunters equal more pressure on coyotes. That leads to a more cunning quarry. By midwinter, the coyote center of higher learning has graduated a new class of coyotes with degrees in evasiveness. That phenomenon, along with my interest in hunting with a dog, brought me to consider hunting outside the prime fur season. At first, I fought the urge due to the value in fur, but the excitement math just did not add up.

Fur prices, although on a roller coaster, appear to be going the way of the dodo bird. Coyote numbers, despite their reluctance to oftentimes engage to calls during the winter, seemed sound. My dogs appreciated the in-your-face engagement of warm-season coyotes over their standoffish demeanor in winter. And even though I understand you need to remove coyotes consistently from an area to impact their predation effect, it never hurts to give a fawn a chance by removing a coyote when opportunity knocks.

Study after study confirms coyotes drastically shift their diets in the months of May, June and July to focus on fawns of all species. Research points out that in some regions, more than 70 percent of a coyote's diet switches to fawns during this period. In the same breath, every predation control expert I have interviewed points out that removing the occasional coyote does little to counter predation effects. You must have a year-round, focused program—including trapping—to even begin to keep coyotes at bay.

Nevertheless, with poor fur prices, the excitement of the hunt and the possibility of saving a fawn, the other three seasons of the year appealed to me for coyote hunting. How about you?

SPRING HUNTING: TERRITORIAL DEFENDERS

After an extended education session from winter predator hunters, you would correctly assume coyotes would keep their guard up. Interestingly, they actually supercharge the effort in early spring. Why? Pairs, formed after the first of the year, now claim territory with dens being the focus of their universe. Pups will be on the way by late March with April being a top month for stork visits. Litter size varies and coyotes can increase litters based on a decreasing population. If you shoot many coyotes, the remaining females will produce more to maintain a healthy populace. Average litters range from four to six, but reports of 10 or more pups in a den are common.

Prior to the arrival of the new family and throughout the year, coyotes maintain territories. Territories change depending on mate selection, food availability, dominant coyotes, habitat alterations and a host of other factors. Nevertheless, once a pair establishes a spring den area and pups are on the way or arrived, they rarely tolerate transients.

I see this behavior every spring whether I am engaged in coyote hunting or not. Oftentimes it occurs while out shed-antler hunting with my dog (who also doubles as a coyote dog). While hiking, my border collie Sully will suddenly disappear in a flash. A quick scan reveals the obvious reason. He spotted a coyote eyeing our activity and in typical spring fashion, they two will face off. Many times, the coyote will follow along or even approach to display its infuriation with our presence, likely near a den site.

SPRING STRATEGY

Bringing a spring coyote within shooting range requires nothing more than a coyote howl. There is no need to get the coyote version of Babel. A series of lone howls, advertising a coyote looking for company, easily provokes the ire of most coyotes. Parents move quickly to deter others from invading hunting grounds or endangering the den site. The same is true of dogs and why using a dog in the spring makes sense.

As April passes, coyotes, particularly the males, bring food back to the den for females and eventually pups as they are weaned. Hunting is of utmost importance, so prey-in-distress calls should not be shunned. And since keeping the pantry stocked is such a priority, forget about matching sounds to the season. If cottontail distress does not entice a response, move on to fawns, piglets or even bird distress.

To facilitate further success, locate the site of any dens in your hunting area. Watching coyotes travel to or from an area in a pattern provides a solid clue. Ranchers or farmers may have firsthand observations to share. While calling, you do not need to set up in sight of the den, but being in the next valley or behind an adjacent ridge puts you within earshot of concerned parents who will deploy readily upon hearing your calls.

While shed-antler hunting, I repeatedly witnessed one to two coyotes retreating into a side canyon. Believing it to be the site of a den, I planned a hunt with a favorable wind forecast. Instead of setting up in the main canyon, I chose a feeder creek

Add a decoy to aid in realism while using coyote vocalizations. Mark Kayser employs his dog Sully, but sometimes utilizes a Montana Decoy Song Dog decoy depending on the setup.





Don't discount scent strategies. The right lure can bring an otherwise wary dog in.

a half mile away. Using nothing more than a series of lone howls, I did not have to wait long. A single coyote trotted in from the direction of the supposed den and did not hesitate to boldly approach to within 100 yards. The shot was a slam dunk compared to the struggles of calling in late-season coyotes.

DOG DAYS OF SUMMER: PROTECTORS OF THE CLAN

Why hunt coyotes in the summer? Other than the proverbial answer of "why not?" summer coyote hunting represents action. This ignites due to parental concerns of protecting the clan of pups. It does not take long for pups to begin exploring once their eyes open. Curiosity kills the cat and lures pups from their den to the immediate area surrounding it.

Adults quickly round up the pups and command them back into the den if danger seems imminent. They also engage any perceived danger. That includes other coyotes, dogs and even humans. Like spring, they don't hold back on making an appearance to investigate, divert or engage possible hazards to pups.

Depending on the makeup of the den, the pair may approach to take on a threat and even siblings or pups from the previous year may join in. It is common to have two, three or even four adults charge to the rescue.

DOGS AND DECOYS

For me and a handful of others, the dog days of summer literally is for the dogs. You can utilize a dog while coyote hunting for the most excitement you ever experienced since your first brush with true love. Coyotes have no apprehension about approaching dogs. Dogs trained to engage with coyotes move in close and then lure the coyote back for chip shots with the full understanding the person behind the rifle is a problem solver.

My latest dog is still learning the ropes, but does not hesitate to meet a coyote face to face. Of course, not all dogs have the wherewithal to be let loose on the hunt. Dogs need to be bold, speedy and understand commands. They also must know when they've met their match. Pomeranians and pugs do not belong in coyote country.

Instead of testing your marriage by bringing your lapdog into the field, consider adding a decoy like the Song Dog from Montana Decoy Company. The photorealistic decoy includes a magnetic fluffy tail and provides the lure and stalling power without you needing to explain the disappearance of beloved Muffin. Add in a splash of Wildlife Research Center's Coyote Urine and you have a combo that looks and smells the part.

Choose a vantage point with wind dominance and utilize howls to start your theatrics. Lone howls suffice, but the yapping of a pair also incites a response. Adding in prey distress after 10 minutes or so could also spark the appearance of territorial coyotes.

This past summer I arrived at a potential denning area at daybreak and posted my dog Sully beside me. Five minutes in I spotted a coyote 500 yards away scanning our direction. It disappeared, but 15 minutes later Sully took off like a SpaceX rocket. I followed his track and two coyotes stood their ground. One flared its hackles as Sully approached and began screaming maddening yips. Sully locked up within 15 yards of the coyote and I swung for the shot. The V-Max pummeled the coyote straight on and Sully raced in to count coup. Unfortunately, the second coyote escaped in an adjoining draw. A follow-up inspection revealed the tough-guy coyote was a large, adult male. End of story.

FALL COYOTE FUN: PUP PANDEMONIUM

The answer to why hunt coyotes before prime fur time is because there are more of them at this time of year than any other. Instead of staging by dens, adolescent coyotes have the curiosity to roam with an exploring desire. Many stay in small family groups of siblings to increase hunting success, but few have mom and dad following along. Instead of calling in singles you are just as likely to call in doubles, triples or even more.



In the spring and early summer coyote parents race to coyote vocalizations to protect their pups from canine invaders.

This occurrence diminishes as winter arrives. Pups disperse, others are shot by deer hunters and a few just succumb to Mother Nature's law of natural selection.

The second reason to bring out the calls in the fall is higher education. Young-of-the-year coyotes have an elementary school background in survival. They are still perfecting their hunting skills and when prey can be easily acquired, they run to take advantage of it. In fact, pack mentality creates competition and



a run for the roses when two or more pups begin the chase. You cannot ask more of your predator hunt than the possibility of multiple coyotes running to the simplest of calls, can you?

Other than hunters taking advantage of an incidental coyote trophy during another pursuit, few people are hunting coyotes in the fall, especially early. Other seasons garner their attention and the coyote hunting contests of winter are still a month or more away.

SIMPLE AND EASY

Never say never, but from early to mid-fall you do not need to get fancy with your calling. Simple prey-in-distress calls bring most youngsters running. In many of my articles, I stress to stay away from calls that the average hunter may use too much, such as the popular rabbit- or hare-distress sounds. Forget that and go for it during fall setups. Almost any nonthreatening distress calls can bring a coyote or gaggle of pups bounding your way.

Of course, to every rule there is an exception. One sound that you may wish to avoid in the fall, particularly during the early portion, are howls. As pups disperse, they may face aggressive confrontations while crossing territories of other coyotes. You may encounter a toughened pup who ignores threats, but why risk a pup slinking away when it could end up in your lap. Plus, if prey sounds do not spark action, you can always transition to howls late in the set or on the next one.

Early last November in Kansas, I found myself with a free day between whitetail hunts, so I ditched the bow and grabbed my Sig Sauer-topped Bergara. I always carry a predator rifle along for just this possibility.

My first stand ended poorly with no coyotes in a valley that rarely failed to produce. I moved to an upland pasture above a brush-choked creek bottom below. Feeling that 'yotes were close, I started out with high-pitched rodent squalls. Nothing appeared, so I increased the call anxiety by switching to the louder sounds of rabbit distress.

Scanning the brush line, I was shocked to see the yellow, piercing eyes of a coyote squinting through the tall grass. I did not twitch. When the coyote trotted from cover and toward me, I waited until it did a quick look around before adjusting to line up for the shot. The suppressed shot slapped across the pasture to pummel the coyote. It was not yet fully prime, but boosting my confidence with a textbook setup was payment enough to try another season for coyotes. 📍

A

ALPS ULTRALIGHT ELITE

As the sporting goods aisles expand with predator hunting galore, the temptation exists to take it all. I admit, I try. In addition, most of my hunts take place in a cross-country fashion meaning I need to carry water, layers, lunch, shooting sticks and calls. Instead of diversifying with a pack that has a predator focus, I turn to my all-around pack to carry everything. Whether elk or deer hunting, my choice is the new Alps OutdoorZ multifunctional backpack, the Ultralight Elite.

To ensure it fits all hunting missions, Alps designed the pack to be customizable in a lightweight system. The Ultralight Elite is 30-percent lighter and 30-percent stronger than other Alps packs. They offer the pack as a frame alone for meat-hauling duties or you can purchase pack bags to add on. Currently Alps offers an 1,800-cubic-inch and a 3,800-cubic-inch bag.

Either attaches or detaches easily with an aluminum hook system. The 3,800-bag model and frame top out at 5 pounds, 13 ounces and has been my choice for coyote hunting in any season. The contoured lumbar design, torso adjustment, air mesh and 500D Cordura construction ensure your equipment will be hauled effortlessly and guarded from nature's extremes. Pack bags are hydration compatible and include a rain fly, plus a bow/rifle carrying system.

\$500; alpsoutdoorz.com



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New Prostate Discovery Helps Men Avoid “Extreme Bathroom Planning”

Men across the U.S. are praising a revolutionary prostate pill that's 1000% more absorbable. Now the visionary MD who designed it is pulling out all the stops to keep up with surging demand...

Among the all-too-familiar, occasional problems like sleepless nights, frequent urination, late-night wake ups, a bladder that's never quite empty, and constant, extreme planning for rest stops and bathroom breaks.

These are the common signs of inconvenient urinary issues. But men nationwide are now reporting they've found help these occasional problems thanks to a major breakthrough in nutrient technology.

Prosta-Vive LS is the new prostate pill sweeping the nation. Men say they feel they're now having strong, complete, effortless urine flow they enjoyed in their 20s and 30s.

The key to its success is a new nutrient technology that makes the key ingredient 1000% more absorbable, according to a study by endocrinologists at Washington University in St. Louis.

Nick Summers is the spokesman for Primal Force Inc., the firm in Royal Palm Beach, Fla. that makes **Prosta-Vive LS**. He reports demand is surging due to word-of-mouth and social-media.

"We knew **Prosta-Vive** really worked to 'support healthy, stronger urine flow,'" Summers stated. "But no one could have predicted the tens of thousands of men looking for a truly supportive prostate pill."

NEW PROSTATE FORMULA DRAWS 5-STAR REVIEWS

It's not the first time Dr. Al Sears, the Florida-based MD who designed the breakthrough formula, has shaken up the status quo in men's health.

A nationally recognized men's health pioneer and the founder of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Royal Palm Beach, Fla., Dr. Sears has been featured on ABC, CNN, and ESPN.

He's authored more than 500 books, reports, and scientific articles, many focusing on prostate issues that may affect virtually all men sooner or later.

"By age 60, I find about half of my male patients feel the need for prostate support," Dr. Sears explains. "By the time they reach age 80, it's over 90 percent."

Prosta-Vive LS has reportedly made a life-changing difference for these men.

One appreciative thank-you letter came from Jim R, a patient.

"I had immediate results," Jim R. wrote in his thank-you note. "I slept through the night without going to the bathroom.

"Last night was the most amazing of all," he added. "I slept for 10 hours without going to the toilet."

Results like these explain the flood of phone calls the company's customer service department is handling from men who want to know how the new formula works...

PROSTATE PILL BACKED BY CLINICAL RESULTS

Prosta-Vive LS's extraordinary success is being attributed to advanced innovations in nutrient technology.

Most prostate pills rely on either outdated saw palmetto ... or the prostate-soothing compound Beta-Sitosterol.

But Dr. Sears cites growing evidence that saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol work much better together than either does on its own.

In fact, a recent clinical trial involving 66 men taking a combination of saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol reported "significant" improvement across the board.

Among the results: Fewer of those occasional late-night wake ups, a stronger stream, less starting and stopping, and complete emptying of the bladder.

That's why **Prosta-Vive LS** includes both saw palmetto and Beta-Sitosterol, to ensure men get the extra prostate support they need. Frustrated men say it's giving them tremendous support.

But there's another key reason **Prosta-Vive LS** is helping men get back control in the bathroom.

YOUR PROSTATE IS HUNGRY FOR HEALTHY FAT

The other key innovation in **Prosta-Vive LS** is its addition of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

"It turns out what's good for your heart is also good for your prostate," says Dr. Sears. "That's why I put heart-healthy omega-3s in a prostate pill."

Researchers have long known Beta-Sitosterol has a great potential to sup-



NO more extra "pit stops", NO more interrupted meetings - Men are free of bathroom woes and feel RELIEF.

port healthy prostate function.

But Beta-Sitosterols are "hydro-phobic" -- they don't mix well with water. And that can make them much harder for the body to absorb.

That's where long-chain omega-3s come in. The latest research shows they boost Beta-Sitosterol absorption by 1000%.

Dr. Sears explains, "Most people only get trace amounts of Beta-Sitosterol because it can be hard to absorb. In this respect, the long-chain fatty acids in **Prosta-Vive LS** are a real game-changer. They supercharge the absorption."

This improved absorption is proving to be a revolutionary advance. **Prosta-Vive LS** is changing men's lives, quickly becoming the No. 1 support supplement for supporting men's prostate health nationwide.

Now, grateful men are calling almost every day to thank **Prosta-Vive LS** for supporting a renewed sense of empowerment over their own lives.

One patient, Ari L., wrote, "I used to get up on occasion at night to go to the bathroom. Now I only get up once... and I feel it has supported my prostate, keeping my PSA levels in the normal range."

Patients report they have more energy, sleep better, and no longer feel embarrassed by that occasional sudden need to use the restroom.

Thanks to **Prosta-Vive LS**, thousands of men feel more confident about their urinary health and are no longer being held hostage to pee problems and

feel more confident about their urinary health.

They say they're getting great sleep and finally feel back in charge of their own lives.

HOW TO GET PROSTA-VIVE LS

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique nutrient technology that effectively relieves the urge to go is with Dr. Sears' breakthrough **Prosta-Vive** formula.

To secure a supply of **Prosta-Vive**, men need to contact the Sears Health Hotline directly at **1-800-224-1349**.

"It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer and we're racing to keep up with demand."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Prosta-Vive's** effectiveness that all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you your money back," he says.

Given the intense recent demand, the Hotline will only be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for restocking. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again!

Call **1-800-224-1349** NOW to secure your limited supply of **Prosta-Vive** at a significant discount. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **PHPV223** when you call.



TWO FOR ONE

CRAIG BODDINGTON

JUST ONE RIFLE FOR VARMINTS AND BIG GAME?



YOU KNOW THE OLD ADAGE: “Be-ware the one-gun man,” the hunter who has just one rifle, knows it intimately and is deadly. The staunchest one-gun man I know of was Charlie Ren (1879-1942). Back in the 1930s, Ren outfitted in southern Arizona and northern Mexico; his client list included Jack O’Connor, Elmer Keith, Frank Hibben, Grancel Fitz and my uncle, Art Popham. Ren’s one and only rifle was a battered 1899 Savage in .25-35, asserting to O’Connor it was “all the gun I need.”

In his time and place, Ren probably didn’t hunt elk, but we don’t want to know how many desert bighorns that rifle accounted for, plus Coues white-tails, desert mule deer, coyotes and bobcats. Probably mountain lions, and in those lawless days in Mexico, perhaps jaguar. I’m not suggesting his choice was the best, even then, but it was what he had and made it work, which is what the one-gun man does. His rifle be-

comes a familiar friend; he knows its strengths—and its limitations—and takes his shots accordingly.

DEFINITIONS

Our goal is to have one rifle that we can use with confidence for both varmints and big game. First, let’s consider what that means to each of us. Varmint hunting takes many forms. I’m not a dedicated predator caller. Coyotes are shot on sight and I’m not concerned about pelt damage, so it doesn’t much matter what I use. A bobcat pelt I would care about, but I’m not mad at my bobcats. Around my farm, armadillos are our most destructive varmints. We also have too many possums that are hard on ground-nesting birds. Again, it doesn’t much matter what I’m shooting.

For me, serious varmint hunting means small rodents, prairie dogs and ground squirrels, maybe once in a while

a foray into rockchuck or groundhog country. These are precision pursuits, requiring accuracy and range. Whether it does single or double duty, my varmint rifle must shoot tight groups. Even one MOA is barely good enough; half that is better. Such a rifle wears a bigger scope than needed for dispatching pests, and bigger than essential for most larger game. It doesn’t have to be giant, but I’m thinking more than the do-it-all 3-9X, maybe between 2-12X and max 3-18X.

Big game denotes even more variety. For most of us, big game means deer and, today, perhaps feral hogs. If this is the case, then solutions are pretty simple. If your big game includes elk and perhaps more, then things get complicated. Clearly, your one-rifle battery must have the accuracy for the smallest varmints, and shoot flat enough for your distances. It must also have enough power for the largest game you hunt. You may need to make some compromises.

.22 CENTERFIRES

I love shooting small rodents with .17s, but my go-to varmint rifle is a .204 Ruger. The .17s and .20s don't carry enough bullet weight or energy for game larger than coyotes. Centerfire .22s are the premier varmint rifles. Today they are generally legal for deer, and we have heavier .22-caliber bullets designed for larger game. My "ranch rifle" is a Rock River AR in .223 (It happens to be left-hand eject, imagine that.), scoped with a Leupold VX6 2-12X. It stays handy for armadillos and coyotes, and I take it on my annual prairie dog shoot. With loads it likes, accuracy runs about .75 MOA, not ideal, but good enough. With that rifle, I keep my shots within about 250 yards, so "minute of prairie dog."

With 62-grain bullets, it has accounted for a number of whitetails and hasn't let me down. The barrel is 1:12 twist, so accuracy suffers with heavier bullets. But that doesn't matter because I keep my shots close. Regardless of widespread current use, I'm not big on .22 centerfires for deer, and am convinced they aren't enough gun for larger hogs. Accurate and easy to shoot? Yes, which aids in shot placement. For head-shot specialists it's perfect, but I'm not among them.

My biggest concern about deer and hogs with .22 centerfires isn't killing game. Rather, absent brain and spine, finding game. Hogs don't bleed much anyway. My experience is that whitetails, even if well-hit, leave little blood spoor with .22s, and travel farther than if hit with heavier bullets of larger caliber. For game larger than deer, forget it. Start making compromises and step up to something larger. However, if your hunting is primarily for varmints with occasional deer and hogs, a .22 centerfire could fill the bill. Just accept that, on larger game, you must be precise with shot placement and conservative with shooting distances. Although the .223 is by far the most popular, you can hedge your bets with faster .22s. On deer, there's quite a difference in energy and effect between the .223 and .22-250.

THE STANDARD ANSWER

Introduced in 1955, the .243 Winchester quickly became (and remains) the world's most popular crossover varmint/big game



cartridge, with rifles and ammo produced by everyone. Like so many of us, I took my first big game (mule deer and pronghorn) with a .243. Mild in recoil and accurate, the .243 remains a common choice for a first hunting rifle. Not just a kid's cartridge, the .243 is powerful enough for any deer, and makes a fine expert's cartridge as well.

It's also a darned good varmint cartridge. Initial loads were 80 and 100 grains. The heavier bullet was the deer/pronghorn load, while the 80-grain bullet was the varmint load. Today there's better, 55-grain bullets that are shockingly accurate in many rifles and loaded to a sizzling 4,000 fps. In varmint mode, one of the problems with anything much above .223 is recoil. Not much, but enough to preclude calling your shots through the scope, which is useful with the varminting I do—such as prairie dogs. The lighter bullets produce less recoil, which helps, but here comes another possible compromise if you do more varminting than big game. Consider a .243 with a heavier barrel. Not as much fun to carry in the field, but it's more stable and heats up slower.

The 6mm (bullet diameter .243) is not a big gun, but it's a lot more than a .22 centerfire. Although most popular, the .243 Win. is not the only 6mm an-

swer, and it may not be the best. The .243 has been standard with a 1:10 twist since 1955, with 100-grain bullets the practical limit for stabilization. As we know, longer/heavier bullets are "in," with 6mm bullets now up to 110 grains. It doesn't sound like much, but that's ten percent more bullet (same difference between 150 and 165 grains in .30-caliber). The problem is, most older 6mm rifles won't shoot them. Though not popular, the 6mm Remington runs 100 fps faster than the .243. Long barreled with a 1:9 twist, it does fine with bullets up to 105 grains, but its shaky with the new 108- and 110-grain bullets. The much faster—but uncommon—.240 Weatherby is quick, but also has a 1:10 twist and is about done at 100 grains.

So, if you lean more toward deer and hogs and less toward varmints—and a 6mm seems the answer—think about the 6mm Creedmoor, barreled with faster twist (1:7.5 or 1:8). It may not shoot the lightest bullets as well, but will shoot the newer, heavier bullets. Velocity is similar to the .243, but the heavier bullets make a difference. Last year I did some prairie dog shooting with Hornady's new 6mm ARC, a stubby little cartridge designed for AR compatibility and also barreled with



Boddington's first use of the new 6mm ARC was in a prairie dog town using a bolt-action platform with a heavy barrel.

faster twist for the heavier bullets. It is not as fast as the 6mm Creedmoor or .243, but I'd have no qualms about hunting deer with it; ten percent more bullet weight is a good trade for a bit of speed.

All said and done, if your "big game" means larger than deer, then no 6mm is your best answer. Yeah, I know, lots of elk are shot every year with .243s, and I've seen black bears taken cleanly, but I wouldn't be comfortable. It's just not enough gun.



Boddington isn't a fan of .22 centerfires for deer, but with common sense and proper bullets, they work well—and they're ideal for varminting.



Varmint-class groups from a .22-250, left; and a .25-06, right.

6.5MM

When I was a kid I did a lot of prairie dog shooting with my .264 Win. Mag. An older gent I knew also used his .264. With 100-grain bullets, it's a devastating round. It's also silly, just too much gun for varmint shooting, too much blast and recoil. Today, and largely thanks to the popularity of the 6.5mm Creedmoor, there are plenty of lighter "varmint bullets" in 6.5mm (.264-inch) diameter, mostly from 95 to 100 grains.

I have not taken a Creedmoor to a prairie dog town, but when the .260 Rem. was new, I did quite a bit of prairie dog shooting with it, using 100-grain bullets.



A wide variety of firearms and cartridges are suitable for varminting, but the consistent hallmarks are accuracy and light recoil.

It's easy to get the light bullets clear to 3,100 fps, and the Creedmoor will do the same. It is plenty flat-shooting and effective for varmints. With less bullet weight, recoil is milder. But it's still a bit much to call your shots through the scope. For big game, you can step up a full 40 percent (or more) in bullet weight. I'm not convinced that even the vaunted Creedmoor, with 140-grain bullet at 2,700 fps, is an ideal all-around elk cartridge, especially for big bulls. But it will do the job well at medium ranges, and it's plenty of gun for all deer-sized game on up to big hogs.



This big boar dropped to a quartering-on shoulder shot from a .250 Savage with 100-grain bullet.

For one-rifle-for-all, any of the medium-velocity 6.5mms are good choices, in part because of the tremendous range in bullet weights (95 to 160 grains). The Creedmoor is the most popular by far, but there's little performance difference between it, the .260 Rem. and the old 6.5x55 Swedish Mauser. The now-several magnum 6.5mms obviously deliver much more energy, but even "Mag-niac" Boddington will not recommend any magnum cartridges in this story, just too much blast and recoil for sensible varmint shooting.

I am also dramatically impressed by the stubby little 6.5 Grendel. Again, it depends on your definition of "big game." Sized for the AR platform, the Grendel maxes out at 130-grain bullets, and is much slower than the Creedmoor. It is not an elk cartridge, but we've had a number of Kansas deer taken with it, and I had a ball in a prairie dog town with an Alexander Arms AR in 6.5 Grendel. Shooting 129-grain bullets, recoil was mild enough that I could call my shots through the scope, and I've seen no problems dropping big whitetails with the same load.

MAYBE CHARLIE REN HAD IT RIGHT

Did I leave something out? Oh, yeah, what about the .25s? I am not a quarter-bore

guy, but the folks who love their .25-calibers really love them. Just as old Charlie Ren loved his .25-35. I have a .25-35; its fine for deer, but not fast enough or—in its most common lever-action platforms—accurate enough for modern varminting.

So, with apologies to Mr. Ren, let's look at .25s worth considering. Standard .25-caliber (.257-inch) bullets run from 60 to 122 grains, a credible spread. By far the most popular is the .25-06. Among serious varmint shooters, the



Jack O'Connor, right, was not a one-gun man, but outfitter Charlie Ren definitely was, holding his Savage 1899 in .25-35, the only rifle he used.

.25-06 is often cited as the largest and most powerful cartridge worth considering. They will quickly add that “you can’t call your shots through the scope,” and you can’t. There’s too much recoil, but it’s certainly not uncomfortable with light bullets, and you can always go to a heavier barrel if varminting is more important. The speed is there; up to 3,700 fps with 75-grain bullets. The .257 Wby. Mag. is clearly faster, delivering more energy, but more expensive to feed, with a lot of blast and recoil for varmint shooting. Again, I just don’t see the need for any magnum cartridge in this dual-purpose role.

To my thinking, even the .25-06, though light-kicking and easy to shoot, is an awful big gun for sustained varmint shooting, but it’s not the only .25-caliber worth considering. Two old-timers, the .250 Savage and .257 Roberts, are milder and still effective. Clear back in 1915,

the .250 Savage was the first cartridge to break 3,000 fps. Though rarely seen in new rifles, with handloads it can push 75-grain bullets up to 3,200 fps. The .257 Roberts (1934) is still chambered in some new rifles. The 75-grain varmint bullets can be loaded to a sizzling 3,500 fps, and it achieves credible velocity with bullets up to 120 grains. With light bullets, recoil drops to zilch.

Now, as to performance on big game, you need to talk to genuine .25-caliber fans who, in my experience, will be happy to bend your ear. That bullet diameter just isn’t my thing, but I’ve taken big game with almost all of them: From .25-20 through .25-35, .250 Savage, .257 Roberts, .25-06, on up to the .257 Weatherby, even including the short-lived .25 WSSM. I’ve found the .250 Savage, .257 Roberts and .25-06 dramatically effective on whitetails and even large hogs.

I haven’t taken much game bigger than deer with any of them, but outspoken .25-caliber fans will make the argument there is only .007-inch difference in diameter between .25 (.257-inch) and 6.5mm (.264-inch). That’s the same as the difference between .270 (.277) and 7mm (.284), so there’s no valid argument about frontal area. We can say that a 120-grain .25-caliber bullet can’t hit as hard or penetrate as well as a 140-grain 6.5mm. However, every fall, a lot of Western hunters go after their elk with .257 Roberts and .25-06, believing that’s “all the gun they need.”

In the big-game mode, the .25s are better than anything smaller. In the varmint mode, not as versatile as .22s or 6mms, but also better than anything larger, with light bullets that sizzle. His cartridge choice may not have been ideal, but maybe old Charlie Ren was onto something with his .25-caliber. 📌

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Coming In To The Call

MOST OF US use some sort of call or technique to coax a game animal into range. Voice calls are employed to deceive turkeys, geese, ducks, deer, elk, moose and other animals. It's likely that the use of calls originated with early native people since it's natural and logical to imitate the critters we're hunting.

But what about a method that's so unique the inventor, a savvy outdoorsman who witnessed a peculiar incident, was able to capitalize on what he saw? About 80 years ago, Morton Burnham heard a high-pitched squealing emanating from near a wire fence on his ranch. He rushed over to see what it was and discovered a highly agitated jackrabbit caught up in the wire. Suddenly a pair of coyotes appeared, pounced on the rabbit and ran off with it.

Morton was amazed. In all his years on the ranch he'd never seen anything like that before. His reaction was to try to imitate the rabbit's distress squeal and likewise draw in a coyote.

His effort worked, and he knew he was on to something. But he didn't realize how monumental the concept would become. He whittled a few mouth calls and gave them to friends. His sons, Murry and Winston established a brand-new venture called Burnham Brothers predator calls. An entirely new hunting technique was born and was quickly adopted around the country.

This account of the birth of varmint distress calls was told to me by the late Murry Burnham who recently passed away at age 93. I met Murry more than 50 years ago on a Texas hunt. We became good friends and he served as my earliest mentor, teaching me strategies about hunting predators, turkeys and whitetail deer. Rattling whitetails was just becoming the rage in Texas and Murry was a master.

My introduction to a predator call occurred when I was a college student studying forestry and wildlife at Utah State University. In 1961, a classmate showed me a predator call that he'd just purchased. I'd never heard one before and asked him to blow it. When he did, half the guys in the dormitory ran to the room, believing someone was being mortally attacked. I was immediately skeptical and figured the call was bogus. Why in the world would a coyote be attracted to that weird screeching sound?

I was writing an outdoor column for the university paper and asked if I could borrow the call, thinking it would make for a humorous story. I drove up a nearby canyon, hiked up a sagebrush slope overlooking a thick stand of timber and blew



the call. Nothing happened for 10 minutes and I was feeling foolish when a pair of coyotes dashed out of the timber and made a beeline for me. Since I had zero confidence in the call, the only gun I had with me was a Hi-Standard nine-shot .22 revolver. When a wind shift alerted the coyotes to my presence, they skidded to a halt and bolted into the timber.

I was sold. This crazy call worked. When I eventually met Murry, I learned his secrets. Gary Roberson bought Burnham Brothers calls and I continued to hunt with both of them. Roberson and I became good friends, and I was curious to watch him in the field. When I invited him to hunt around my home in northern Wyoming, he asked if we could call in places that were heavily hunted by coyote hunters. I knew of several spots and was skeptical, but Roberson killed four coyotes despite the constant hunting pressure. It was a terrific educational experience for me to learn the nuances of calling and hunting coyotes.

Nowadays, there are all sorts of calls and techniques. Much of this issue addresses everything you need to know about predator hunting. Every time I read an article, I'm reminded of that day in Utah when a pair of coyotes made me a believer. 📍



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