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Reviewed in the United States on March 26, 2025

Style:256-25 | **Verified Purchase**

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★★★★★ **Worth Every Penny!!**

Reviewed in the United States on May 23, 2025

Style: 384-25 | **Verified Purchase**

I was incredibly surprised by this, I was very nervous about buying a scope online but it did not disappoint!! It has so many features, works insanely well and worth every penny We live on a farm and have issues with predators but since we bought this it has saved many of our animals!

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HERE IS WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY

Brian Broerman **recommends DNT Optics**

June 2

Just got into thermal optics, and the Thermnight Thermal/NV combo is legit. it goes toe-to-toe with the high-end brands, and the NV/IR/RF features are a solid add-on. Was a bit worried all those extras might be a pain to deal with, but they're dead simple to use, and the unit's as compact as it gets. No complaints here great piece of kit.

Rylan John Coleman **recommends DNT Optics**

July 22

I've tried all the major brands of digital NV scopes. None of them beat the new Zulus V2 in clarityand ease of use with the software for getting set up on the rifle. Absolutely would recommend to all.

Michael Kuter

★★★★★ **recommends DNT Optics**

August 16

Picked up the DNT one. Its absolutely my favorite optic right now for long distance. I have taken my rifle out to one mile using this scope.



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Bruce Gerlach

★★★★★ **recommends DNT Optics**

September 23 at 9:59 AM

Just received a Zulus v2 and compared to a couple of ATNs I have, I love this. Smaller platform clearer screen and zoom is sooooo much better, built in IR light is a night touch.

Jeff Naples

★★★★★ **recommends DNT Optics**

July 22

Just received my Zulus 5-20 lrf V2. The quality and imaging, both day and night, are absolutely amazing. The updated features are fantastic. I'm waiting for my rifle to be cerakoted. This optic will be mounted immediately upon cerakote completion, then a trip to the range, can't wait. In the meantime, I have been getting accustomed to the controls and started playing around with the DNT ballistic app. Very happy owner, DNT's customer service has been exceptional. Looking at the Hydra as well!

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PRO STAFF:
Steve Comus has been a fixture in the hunting and shooting press for decades. He is currently the Director of Communications for Safari Club International.

The State Of Predator Hunting

NEVER HAS THERE BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BE A PREDATOR HUNTER THAN RIGHT NOW. This suggestion might fly in the face of additional laws and regulations, of ceaseless attacks by anti-hunters or of the shrinking size of wildlands throughout the country. Regardless, there is one thing certain: Every day that we are not out hunting predators is one less day we'll have in our individual hunting lives and in the collective life of predator hunting as a passion or a mission. In other words, use it or lose it. When we do what we do and when we are what we are, we are not only true to ourselves, but also, we're being true to the hunting tradition and culture.

There is good news, bad news and goofy news on the predator hunting front these days, and much of it is confusing, to say the least. It's difficult to list all the ways something as simple as hunting can become complex and confusing.

"Hunting is one of the oldest human activities. It's in our DNA."

For example, in recent times, bear hunting seasons have been approved in both Florida and Louisiana. That's nice and it's about time, given the wins on the sustainable use conservation front. But there also is a judge in Montana who is clouding the waters concerning Northern Rocky Mountain wolves by questioning findings that show the wolves should be taken off the endangered or threatened lists. Seems as though we win some, lose some and, as they say, some just get rained out, so to speak.

And then there are the male jaguars who are violating The Wall between Mexico and the United States and showing up in southern Arizona. It is not legal to hunt jaguars in the U.S., yet it was a mountain lion hunter who spotted a jaguar and reported the most recent sighting. Southern Arizona is not jaguar country, so to speak, yet in recent years there have been a handful of sightings and/or images of jaguars captured on trail cameras in the area north of the border with Mexico.

Since none of the jaguars documented in Arizona were females or cubs, it's assumed that it is not a viable habitat for them — just males expanding their cruising areas. Some observers suggest that The Wall has something to do with the jaguars being in Arizona. It's curious to suppose that a wall would help them cross the border, but what does logic have to do with some of the stuff people say about wildlife these days?

Add to that the continuing quibbling over predator hunting "contests," and there's lots going on, but nothing to consider catastrophic or about which to be euphoric. What this means is that it is time to go hunting, have fun and do what it is we do — hunt predators.

Hunting is one of the oldest human activities. It's in our DNA. Certainly, hunting of any kind becomes complex when it finds itself intertwined with contemporary society. Just the human encroachment of wild places would be enough alone to complicate the situation, but factor in the anti-hunters and their lackeys in the media, government and the courts, and the picture becomes extremely confusing, at best. Bluntly, I suggest that hunting in general is overregulated, and that predator hunting is faced with a seemingly never-ending proliferation of rules, regulations and other barriers.

But so much for the soap box, because there is likely zero chance that there will be major positive regulatory changes in the near future. What all of this amounts to is that there are specific wins and losses, which rarely result in good news overall for hunting and especially predator hunting.

In recent years, human/bear conflicts in various states have triggered the discussion about whether to hunt bears in some states, or what the bear hunting seasons should look like in other states where bears have been hunted in recent times.

This is a good example of what happens when an increasing and expanding human population encroaches into wild areas, or when wildlife decides that getting food is easier around human populations than it is in the wilds. Think garbage cans and the like. Regardless of the reason for increasing numbers of bears, the bottom line is that now there are more opportunities to hunt them than before, and that's a good thing.

Other than the utter frustration of watching the wolf saga evolve, it seems like the best results have been two steps forward and one step back. And that applies to the various grouping of wolves, whether they are in the Rockies, the upper Midwest or in the arid Southwest where the Mexican wolf situation continues to amaze.

Speaking of things that continue to amaze, what about the ongoing controversy over predator hunting "contests?" The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation sums up the status of such "contests."

"Predator hunting and hunting tournaments, often referred to as 'contests,' are time-honored traditions that have recently been subjected to extensive scrutiny by the anti-sportsmen's community and misinformed general public," the CSF reports. "Across the nation, both practices serve legitimate and effective purposes toward fish and wildlife conservation efforts. Hunting tournaments are effective management tools of varmint species, such as coyotes, whose overabundance results in increased human-wildlife conflicts and attacks. Unfortunately, predator hunting and hunting tournaments have both been misrepresented by 'animal rights' organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and Project Coyote, who have been spreading emotionally driven misinformation to the general public, elected officials and state fish and wildlife departments, seeking the ultimate goal of completely eliminating predator hunting and hunting tournaments."

Because such contests are the purview of the states in most cases, whether they are allowed and whether they serve a useful purpose is up to individual states. So, with all of these comings and goings around the predator hunting world: Never has there been a better time to be a predator hunter than right now.

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By Alan Clemons



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Illinois Closes Seasons for Hunting, Trapping Gray Foxes

State officials cite a decline in the gray fox population and believe closing the seasons might help them rebound.

HUNTING AND TRAPPING SEASONS FOR GRAY FOXES ARE CLOSED IN ILLINOIS, with surveys and preliminary results of current research indicating a substantial decline in gray fox distribution and abundance during the past 10 years. Although Illinois hunters and trappers harvest few gray foxes, this closure will remove additional pressure and additive mortality from the harvest. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will continue to conduct annual surveys and evaluate the gray fox population.

On June 30, 2025, Gov. JB Pritzker signed into law Public Act 104-0019, which changed language in the Illinois Wildlife Code and allows IDNR to open or close the gray fox season by administrative rule. This bill was an IDNR initiative with broad support from diverse conservation groups including the Illinois Trappers Association and support from state legislators. On July 9, the department filed administrative rules indefinitely closing the hunting and trapping seasons for gray foxes.

Research indicates the gray fox population is on the decline. The closure of the hunting and trapping seasons is a responsible change to protect the species and is supported by most hunters and trappers. Reasons for this decline are complex. Most research indicates that diseases such as canine distemper and competition from other canids, such as coyotes, are the primary causes.

IDNR uses the best available science to guide the management of furbearers in the state. During the past 25 years, the department opened a trapping season for river otters and a hunting and trapping season for bobcats. Data from research and surveys indicate the populations can support a carefully managed otter and bobcat season and allow these species to thrive throughout the state. IDNR will continue to monitor the gray fox population and look for ways to reverse the decline.

BEAR ATTACKS WISCONSIN WOMAN, AND THEN ELUDES STATE WILDLIFE OFFICIALS

Wisconsin DNR officials stopped trapping efforts two weeks after a bear attack but still are monitoring the area for a sow and cub.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources officials concluded efforts to trap the black bear involved in a midday attack on a 69-year-old woman in Barron County. The sow and cub involved have not been observed since the attack despite more than two weeks of aggressive monitoring and extended observation since. The DNR, in partnership with the Barron County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, maintained and monitored a series of live traps and game cameras on the property since the attack occurred the afternoon of July 12.

The victim, 69-year-old Karen Frye, was attacked while in the backyard of her rural residence near Comstock. Frye was transported to a nearby hospital for treatment and recovered. Randy Johnson, WDNR's large carnivore specialist, said officials conducted two weeks of round-the-clock surveillance on the property without additional signs of the sow involved. He said officials trapped and released two boar black bears, two yearling bears and two sows determined to be unrelated to the incident. They also collected a dead sow found along a road about 1.6 miles from the site of the attack, but necropsy results were consistent with injuries from a vehicle collision. There was no evidence of it being the same bear linked to the attack.

Preliminary investigation findings, including information from the family, suggest the bear exhibited a sustained series of aggressive behaviors toward Frye before the attack. Black bears can behave defensively when feeling surprised, cornered or to protect their food or cubs. True aggressive behavior is both rare and distinctive from defensive behavior. Unfortunately, black bears displaying aggressive behavior are an elevated risk for repeating the behavior. Euthanasia was the DNR's plan if the sow had been trapped. If the cub had been trapped it would have been relocated and released.

"Humane euthanasia is not always the standard practice in human/bear conflicts," Johnson said. "Our actions in these types of situations are very carefully determined based upon the totality of the known evidence of each event."

YELLOWSTONE GRIZZLY EUTHANIZED AFTER ACCLIMATION TO HUMAN FOODS

An old bear was killed in Yellowstone when it continued to ransack dumpsters for food and also stayed around several popular areas where tourists stayed, visited.

Yellowstone National Park staff trapped and killed an 11-year-old male grizzly bear on May 14 after the bear repeatedly sought out human food sources in developed areas of the park. Between April 3 and May 13, the 400-pound grizzly bear overturned several large, bear-resistant dumpsters and gained access to human food and trash near Old Faithful, the Nez Perce Picnic Area and the Midway Geyser Basin parking lot.

In addition to developing a strategy to flip over 800-pound dumpsters, the bear also uprooted smaller bear-resistant trash cans from their concrete bases to gain access to human food and garbage. As a result, the bear became increasingly food-conditioned and posed a risk to public safety in one of the busiest areas of the park. The decision to kill the bear was made to ensure public safety and reduce the chances of other bears becoming habituated to human food.

The last grizzly bear killed in a management action in Yellowstone was in September 2017, when the park removed a grizzly bear that was damaging tents and accessing human food in backcountry campsites at Heart Lake.

"It's unfortunate that this bear began regularly seeking garbage and was able to defeat the park's bear-resistant infrastructure," said Yellowstone Bear Management Biologist Kerry Gunther. "We go to great lengths to protect bears and prevent them from becoming conditioned to human food. But occasionally, a bear outsmarts us or overcomes our defenses. When that happens, we sometimes have to remove the bear from the population to protect visitors and property."

In accordance with Yellowstone's Bear Management Plan, the park provides bear-resistant food storage lockers in all campgrounds, food storage devices in all backcountry campsites and bear-resistant garbage cans and dumpsters. Utilizing these bear safety measures remains crucial in ensuring public safety and preventing wildlife from developing dangerous habits.

ARKANSAS TASK FORCE REMOVES MORE THAN 12,000 FERAL PIGS DURING 2024

An Arkansas task force is charged with creating and implementing an eradication plan for wild pigs that inhabit much of the Natural State.

The Arkansas Feral Hog Eradication Task Force destroyed more than 12,000 hogs during 2024, including more than 400 in the northwest part of the state. The group was created in 2017 by the state's Department of Agriculture to fight the pigs that cause more than $1.5 billion in damage to agriculture and ecological interests.

"These include damage to and loss of crops of at least $800 million; injury and transmission of disease to livestock; ecological destruction; property damage; threats to native ground-nesting birds and other small wildlife (including endangered species); and contamination of human food and water supplies," according to the Department of Agriculture.

The task force currently has an interactive program tracker that records the number of hogs taken statewide since 2020. More than 73,200 have been removed by the task force, with another 8,200 eliminated by the public.

RODENTICIDE SITED AS THE REASON FOR BLUE FERAL PIGS IN CALIFORNIA

Several wild pigs in Monterey County had blue muscle or fat, and were found to have ingested an anticoagulant rodenticide that caused the coloration.

Wild pigs in the Monterey County, California, area were exposed to pesticide bait containing the anticoagulant rodenticide diphacinone, according to findings by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Wildlife Health Lab (WHL) and the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory in Davis.

In March, a wildlife trapper reported multiple observations of blue muscle or fat found in wild pigs. The blue tissue can be a sign of rodenticide bait ingestion. CDFW's WHL investigated, finding the anticoagulant rodenticide diphacinone in the stomach and liver contents of one of the wild pigs that was recovered with blue tissues.

Wildlife can be inadvertently exposed to rodenticides either by eating rodenticide bait or by eating other animals that have ingested rodenticides. Rodenticide baits often contain dye to identify them as a poison. Blue-colored muscle or fat may be a sign that game meat has been contaminated by rodenticides, although this blue discoloration might not always be present. CDFW urges hunters to always use caution when harvesting game animals and be aware of potential risks.

"Hunters should be aware that the meat of game animals, such as wild pigs, deer, bears and geese, might be contaminated if that game animal has been exposed to rodenticides," said Dr. Ryan Bourbour, CDFW's Pesticide Investigations Coordinator. "Rodenticide exposure can be a concern for non-target wildlife in areas where applications occur in close proximity to wildlife habitat."

A 2018 study of anticoagulant rodenticide exposure in game animals across California found anticoagulant rodenticide residue in 10 out of 120 (8.3 percent) of the wild pig and 10 out of 12 (83 percent) of the bear tissue samples. These samples were collected largely from animals that were frequenting agricultural or residential areas where rodenticides are commonly/more likely to be used.

Pesticide applicators are urged to take measures when applying rodenticides so as not to expose wildlife. Prior to application, it is important to ensure non-target wildlife are not using the area where the pesticide is to be applied. It is also important to use appropriate bait stations and application methods that exclude access to non-target species. Using an integrated pest management approach for rodent control might help reduce the opportunities for rodenticide exposure for non-target wildlife.

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PRO STAFF:
Alan Clemons has been a professional writer and photographer for more than 35 years, covering news, sports, outdoors and more for newspapers, magazines and websites. He has hunted and fished in more than 40 states and three countries. While he enjoys everything that flies, crawls, walks or swims, two of his favorites are hunting coyotes and feral hogs.
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Bear numbers are on the rise throughout their North American range. In some areas, they are creating issues as conflicts with humans occur.

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The Bear Facts

Are black bears becoming the next wildlife management problem — like feral hogs?

SHOWING UP IN NEIGHBORHOODS AND PARKS. ROOTING AROUND GARBAGE BINS AT HOMES AND BUSINESSES. Occasional attacks on unsuspecting people doing mundane things. Destroying agricultural crops and threatening livestock. Migrating seasonally to find the best food, water and habitat. Growing in population in alarming numbers throughout the country, spreading ranges as they seek new territory.

If that sounds like feral pigs, you're absolutely right. They're a hot mess from Florida to Texas, in California and now making inroads into western Canada. They scare people, can be aggressive and defensive, and have few predators in the wild. During the past couple of years, the news and social media headlines have proclaimed sightings, destruction and general wreaking of widespread havoc. Public parks and cemeteries are affected. Farmers large and small are impacted. Feral pigs are more than a nuisance, for sure.

But all of that can be said for black bears, too, and in more parts of the United States than the nasty, grunting, curly tailed rooters. Bears do many of the same things, with the same tendencies. Seasonal searches for food. Comfortable habituation if food and habitat are available. Typically shying away from humans ... until becoming used to them and sticking around. Persistence on hunting food plots and with feeders, which often don't stand a chance from a hungry bruin with sharp, powerful claws.

Annual hunting seasons and natural mortality help control populations. But it's not a stretch to say that black bears, at least in some states and similar to feral pigs, could become the next big wildlife problem in the country.

Numbers and Range

Black bears were innumerable when explorers first arrived in what would become America. From the Northeast to South Florida, west to Texas, and even along the Pacific Coast, bears were part of the fertile landscape. They were here before feral pigs were introduced in Florida during the mid-1500s by Spanish explorers.

Despite rampant hunting, trapping and even attempts at extirpation in some areas, bears have survived. Numbers declined in some states during the 1800s and early 1900s, before wildlife agency restoration efforts helped increase populations. The formation of non-hunting sanctuaries and preserves, such as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) and others, also was a positive. Bears thrived in such numbers in GSMNP that today, tourists in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg on the Tennessee side of the 522,427-acre park often see them in the towns. This past spring while in Pigeon Forge for three days, I kept my head on a swivel while out on daily runs lest I surprise a sow and cubs; fortunately, the only bears we saw were on cans of Smoky Light Lager at Iron Forge Brewing.

Bears range in size based on their diet and other factors, including hunting pressure. Bruins in the North Carolina coastal Albemarle-Pamlico Peninsula, for example, have an incredible amount of food and grow as large as 880 pounds. Most are 200 to 700 pounds, there and elsewhere. Pennsylvania hunters also take some big bruins each year, including some more than 700 and 800 pounds during the past 15 years. With ample rain and mast, bears don't shy from packing on the pounds for winter hibernation.

Bears are omnivores, seeking and dining primarily on plants and mast. They also are opportunistic and will follow their tremendous sense of smell to any possible food source. That could be something in a house, camper or tent. It might be garbage in a bin behind a restaurant. If a tender whitetail fawn or perhaps a young piglet, goat or chickens at a farm are available, snacks are in order. Some farmers in North Carolina are asking legislators and wildlife officials for help with bears targeting livestock. Feral pigs do the same thing. They're omnivores and move seasonally to the best food sources. They also will eat snakes, eggs, young animals, fruit, spoiled grain or pretty much whatever smells and tastes good that fits in their mouth.

Hunters often see camera images of bears and feral pigs with fawns in spring and summer. Coyotes, of course, also



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take advantage of young deer. Research studies in Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Virginia, among others, dating to 1990, have documented more instances of black bears targeting fawns as bear populations increase. Whitetail fawns hide motionless in brush, put there by the doe while she feeds. A fawn's tawny striped-spotted coat is excellent camouflage. Lack of scent also helps them hide from predators. However, a bear's sense of smell is incredible, possibly detecting something worth investigating up to 2 miles away. Whether black bears can discern a fawn's near-nonexistent aroma or maybe follow the scent of the doe is unknown. Either way, a fawn is no match for a bear, similar to how a young elk is prime fare for a grizzly.

In Florida, which will have its first bear hunt this fall since 2015, hunters regularly find spin cast feeders that have been destroyed by bears. Similar problems occur in south Alabama and Mississippi, where smaller populations exist but hunting is prohibited. Louisiana held its first limited harvest season in 2024; hunters there and in Arkansas regularly find destroyed feeders. A metal or plastic drum full of tasty corn is no match for a hungry bear. Feral pigs hoover whatever is on the ground. Bears simply tip over or yank down the feeder and haul off the booty.

Bears are found throughout the United States from Florida to Alaska, and into Canada and Mexico. Sows have a typical home range of about 10 square miles. A boar's range is about 15 square miles. That's about three times as big as Los Angeles International Airport, or big enough to hold 7,256 football fields. Estimates of state populations show that hunting seasons and natural mortality aren't having much significant impact on the growth.

The same can be said for feral pigs, which reproduce more prolifically and can escape or hide easier than bears. I've seen a 300-pound boar hide in a Texas prickly pear patch, and a squealing sounder disappear amid cactus and mesquite like gnats



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in the wind. Feral pigs number in the millions and are found in at least 35 states. Bears aren't that numerous. But as their numbers increase in developed areas, season bag limits remain low, more human interaction and problems are inevitable.

Headlines, of Course

Thanks to the vastness of the interwebs with its real and dubious news accounts, along with social media, we have more headlines to parse than ever before. Morton's can't supply enough salt for everyone to have a grain or tub when considering what's real.

But common sense usually prevails concerning wildlife encounters. State wildlife agencies provide information and hold meetings about "learning to live with bears" (or alligators, or other animals). But it's not a stretch to say "learning to live with them" can be incredibly challenging with real headlines such as these:

- Sow Attacks 69-Year-Old Woman in Wisconsin
- Massachusetts Officials in Spring Say to Take Down Bird Feeders
- Bear Caught Behind Counter at Tahoe Ice Cream Shop
- New Mexico Man Kills Bear in Home After Break-In
- Tensions Rise as Black Bear Population Boom Continues
- Feisty 6-Pound Pomeranian Chases Black Bear from West Vancouver Home
- Bear Caught on Camera Opening Door and Entering Colorado Home

These aren't much different from those involving feral pigs, such as "Florida Wild Hog Busts Into Lehigh Acres Home, Battles Cops." Some are mundane or interesting, like the yappy Pomeranian chasing away a bear. Good dog! Others are horrific. When bears attack people walking their dogs, in their homes, while working on a tractor or out for a hike, the advice to "learn to live with them" isn't much use. Attacks by feral pigs are less common but still are a threat. When they regularly appear or destroy parks or public areas, people learn to avoid those areas. A bear sauntering through or showing up in your yard? You can be as "bear aware" as anyone but a surprise encounter doesn't always end well.

Any Solutions?

Wildlife agencies are akin to the Wallenda family on the high wire when balancing hunting and society. It's easy to say, "Offer more tags, increase the bag limits on bears!" or gators or deer or hogs. But it's not always that simple. Wildlife officials must juggle wildlife plans, hunters, non-hunters and state legislators. They might as well be tossing around chainsaws.

Non-hunting citizens might not understand or don't care about conservation and hunting. They don't want a "teddy bear hunt" (part of a real Louisiana headline). Many don't want any hunting. That's what's happened in New Jersey, where bear hunts have been controversial for years. Ditto in



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Black bear sows with large litters of three or even four cubs appear to be more common in recent years, reflecting serious population growth in many areas.

Massachusetts. Both are similar to the wolf situations in the Great Lakes and Rockies. While the incidents and populations of bears or other wildlife increases, politicians, citizens, hunters and wildlife officials are in a rugby scrum on a muddy pitch. Throw in the "But the insurance companies!" trope for good measure, too. It's a mess.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife officials are amid a research project to learn why its bear population continues to be above goal numbers. In a press release in September, the agency said Vermont's population goal is 3,500 to 5,500 bears. But for the fourth straight year it's been estimated at 6,800 to 8,000 bears based on 2024 data. Vermont has an annual autumn bear season of about 10 weeks; this year it's September 1 to November 15.

"Our model shows the bear population has remained above our goal of 3,500 to 5,500 bears since 2021, and that matches up with other indicators of population size that we track," said Jaclyn Comeau, the department's lead bear biologist. "High rates of hunter harvest, growing numbers of bears killed by vehicles and increasing conflict between bears and people over the past several years all support that our model is reflecting real population growth."

Eighteen sows were fitted with GPS collars this past summer. Biologists will visit the collared bears' dens this winter to confirm litter size and then track the family units through the cubs' first year. Better understanding of bear reproductive success should yield insights about the population growth.

"Anecdotally, we are hearing about more bears with large litters of three or four cubs," Comeau said. "In our hunter harvest data, we are seeing a larger proportion of young adult bears in the 2- or 3-year-old range. We think this is a result of several years of healthy bears having many cubs, coupled with the resources for those bears to help their cubs survive until they can fend for themselves. Our next step is to see if that explanation, which we think is likely, lines up with conditions on the ground."

Research and data are beneficial, as is input from hunters and citizens. Consideration of increasing bag limits shouldn't be dismissed. Bait and hounds are effective. Reducing the cost of non-resident license fees to encourage more hunting is a thought. Unless some things change in states with problem bears, the situation will remain status quo. Black bears aren't strolling stride-by-stride with feral pigs just yet, but they're not far behind.

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PRO STAFF:
Tim "Spike" Davis is an avid hunter and published cartoonist. He is the "World's Okay-est Coyote hunter."
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Hippy Hippy Shakes

Scattered Thoughts

INTRODUCING A CHILD TO THE CONCEPT OF HUNTING TAKES THE MOST DELICATE TOUCH. One misstep and they could be in therapy for the rest of their life. When my nieces were young, my wife and I would take them to our cabin in the woods for the weekend. On the trip there they would listen to the oldies station on the car radio. One of their favorite songs was, "Hippy Hippy Shake" by The Georgia Satellites. My nieces had no idea what a Hippy was, but they thought the song was funny.

One night, while at our cabin, we heard a critter tearing apart a bird feeder in the yard. My wife slowly got out the flashlight as I loaded my trusty .22 rifle. I silently slid the window open as Amy found the bandit with the beam of light. My nieces peered through the curtains as my rifle made a crack and the bullet impacted the raccoon's skull.

Both of my niece's eyes grew large as the vermin flipped over on its back and went into convulsions and a gruesome death rattle. The elder of the two asked me in a disturbed voice, "What is he doing, Uncle?"

I looked at them both, knowing that my answer would shape their young minds for years to come, and said in a matter of fact tone, "He's got the Hippy Hippy Shakes."



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PRO STAFF:
Jim has been hunting with traditional firearms for more than 30 years. Over the last 20 years, most of his hunting has focused on the use of airguns. He has taken all manner of small game, varmints, predators and, more recently, big game with both production guns and custom big bores.
editors@predatorxtreme.com



The Umarex Hammer carbine is compact yet packs a real punch.

A New Breed of Big-Bore Air Rifles

Powerful big-bore air rifles have legitimized their use for hunting a wide variety of predators and big-game animals.

SINCE THE TIME I WROTE MY FIRST ARTICLE ON BIG-BORE AIRGUNS FOR *PREDATOR XTREME* WAY BACK IN THE EARLY 2000S, these rifles have evolved from being a relatively unknown oddity, to gaining mainstream visibility. Many states now allow their use for hunting deer and other big game, and there are several manufacturers producing them to meet the growing demand.

For many years, there was a common design thread amongst these guns. All were equipped with PCP power plants, came in calibers ranging from .30- to .50-caliber, and most were big, heavy, single-shot rifles. These guns were all bolt actions at first, often with two bolts, with one used to access the loading port and one to cock the gun. Triggers tended to be heavy, and guns often lacked an external safety mechanism, so they needed to be de-cocked when the user was on the move.

Following the earlier rifles built by Quackenbush Airguns in small production batches, large scale manufacturers such as Hatsan, AirForce and others eventually came to market with their own big-bore offerings. The performance was refined in these rifles, achieving higher velocity/energy output, and some began offering even larger calibers, such as .58, .62 and .72. These guns were throwing impressively large chunks of lead downrange with power and accuracy. The ergonomics and controls were also improving, side-lever cocking replaced bolt actions in many designs, safety mechanisms became ubiquitous and trigger quality improved substantially, but the designs were similar to their predecessors.

But as the market continued to expand, new designs started to emerge alongside enhancements to existing gun models. Carbine and bullpup configurations made an entry, the use of regulators to improve consistency and shot count gained traction, and the development of multishot rifles utilizing various approaches became available. In this article I will discuss a couple of the next generation rifles that I've been hunting with and talk about what advanced technology they bring to the table.

Let me start by saying that I am in no way implying the big bores we've used in the past are obsolete or inferior. I have taken truckloads of game animals with my unregulated single-shot Hatsan Piledriver, AirForce Texan and Air Venturi Recluse over the years, and continue to use them year after year. I'm also not a fan of new technology for the sake of new technology, but some of the newer designs offer novel (for the big-bore airguns) features that can be advantageous. As an example of a couple newer designs I've been using, let's take a closer look at the Umarex Hammer .50-caliber and the Western Airguns Rattler .457 SA/FA designs.

"But as the market continued to expand, new designs started to emerge alongside enhancements to existing gun models. Carbine and bullpup configurations made an entry, the use of regulators to improve consistency and shot count gained traction, and the development of multishot rifles utilizing various approaches became available."



Western Airguns' Rattler prefers 365-grain .45-caliber slugs from Airguns of Arizona.

Umarex Hammer .50-caliber

The Umarex Hammer is a transitional hunting platform, in my mind representing an evolutionary step from earlier designs. The primary technology upgrades are that a) the gun is regulated, and b) it is a multi-shot platform that has implemented a two-slug linear magazine. By implementing a regulator, the Hammer produces four to five consistent shots in the compact carbine version, generating up to 565 foot-pounds of energy (fpe) depending on slug weight. There are two purpose-designed slugs offered by Umarex for the gun — 350-grain and 550-grain projectiles — with several others available from third party sources.

The Hammer rifle is 43.75 inches LOA, and the carbine is 34.12 inches LOA, though there is only an ounce or two difference in weight due to the higher volume air tank on the carbine (35 vs 24 cubic inches). As mentioned, the power is higher with the rifle version, but the shot count is about the same. I find the stock ergonomics provide a stable hold and like this gun a lot for its offhand shooting capability. While most previous big-bore designs were single shots, the Hammer is a two-shot repeater, and with an extra magazine you can get four rapid shots with only a single reload.

I have used the Hammer in both the more powerful rifle version and more compact carbine version, to hunt hogs, javelinas and deer. Even though the rifle is more powerful, getting up to 700 fpe for four shots, I find myself gravitating more to the carbine. I find the carbine fits my hunting style of stalking in heavy brush and thickets, and I'll trade off the additional power for better handling in dense cover. Unless I'm hunting bears or elk, there is not much I would shoot with a gun generating 700 fpe that I wouldn't feel comfortable shooting at 565 fpe.

Many rifles of the previous generation have been highly focused on function and less on ergonomics. One of the things I really appreciate about the Hammer carbine is that in addition to excellent performance Umarex has managed to build a well-balanced, ergonomically designed stock and



pistol grip, with logically and conveniently positioned controls. It carries well and is a great shooter off-hand or rested.

Western Airguns Rattler .45-caliber

Another big bore loaded with innovative technology is the Western Airguns .457 (also available in a .35-caliber version). First off, this rifle is a semi-automatic repeater, which represents a lot of firepower on tap! The ammo is fed through a 12-shot revolver-type cylinder that generates 365 fpe in the standard version and up to 435 fpe in the LS configuration. Next, the Rattler is regulated, so the shots are very consistent and reliably cycles the semi-auto action. It is also a key component in optimizing air management that not only improves consistency and reliability but also results in a high shot count of 12 to 36 shots per fill, depending on the setting of the power adjustment.

This rifle has a very modern "tactical" feel to it, with the filling port, magazine

The Western Airguns Rattler is a reliable semi-auto air rifle — a great choice for hunting.





release, firing mode selection and safety, tank and regulator gauges, all well placed and easy to access. The rubber buttpad and pistol grip offer a solid hold, and I find it shoots well for me off-hand. With a LOA of 40 inches, I would not call this a compact rifle, however it is very handy in tight spaces and easy to handle. I also like that there is a moderator extension to the shrouded barrel, making this one of the quietest big bores as well.

The accuracy of this rifle has been impressive, and I can consistently print sub-1-inch groups at 100 yards through the entire shot string. It's useful to have additional shots on tap. I was on a hog hunt earlier in the year and spotted a group of hogs laid up in the morning sun. Stalking in, I lined up on a solid porker still bedded down at 50 yards and dropped a slug on its head, then another pig jumped up and swung around offering a broadside shot that I took. With two down, I swung around on a small pig as it started to run. I missed the first shot but hit him in the back of the head with the follow-up. About this time, I turned and saw the second pig climbing to his feet and sent him to the ground with another body shot. Five shots in about a minute, three pigs in the bag, and I still had enough air and ammo to keep hunting.

This is a worthwhile technology, especially for hog and predator hunting, where you might find a target rich environment. Both rifles utilize a high-pressure air fill; 4,351 psi for the Western Airguns Rattler and 4,500 psi for the Umarex Hammer, so you'll need a method to keep the guns charged with air. This can be achieved using either high-pressure air tanks that can be refilled at a dive or paintball shop, or a portable compressor, which I think is a more cost-effective approach these days.

If you are hunting quarry such as wild hogs or larger predators, where there is potential for multiple targets or the need for rapid follow-up shots, having a multi-shot option that is powerful and consistent is a real advantage, and one of these next generation big bores might be what you are looking for!



A second shot allowed the author to bag this nice javelina on the run.





PRO STAFF:
Sagi served as editor-in-chief of Safari Club International's monthly *Safari Times* for a decade and later joined NRA Publications. There he worked his way up from executive editor positions for several publications and finally served as editor in chief of *Shooting Illustrated*, then the NRA's only newsstand publication. *editors@predatorxtreme.com*



Smith & Wesson 1854 Stealth Hunter Lever-Action Rifle

Smith & Wesson products routinely deliver legendary performance and reliability. The 1854 Stealth Hunter — a member of the company's first lever-action line in roughly 170 years — lives up to that tradition, but goes beyond by wearing many of the features modern predator hunters demand.

IT WAS 1854 WHEN HORACE SMITH AND D.B. WESSON PATENTED THEIR LEVER-ACTION RIFLE. It was fed from a tubular magazine and sent follow-up shots faster than most of its contemporaries. The repeater's ability to heat things up downrange earned it a nickname etched into every firearm lexicon — the "Volcanic."

Despite its success, Smith & Wesson left the lever-action market to its competitors, concentrating instead on pouring its famed quality and innovation into dozens of other groundbreaking designs. Its reputation for double-action revolvers is legendary today. The company's product line expanded through the years and now includes semi-auto pistols and rifles. It didn't return to the creative spark that launched the firm's journey, however, until 2024 when it released two Smith & Wesson 1854 models.

Earlier this year, Stealth Hunter versions were unveiled, wearing features ideal for taking predators, filling tags or protecting the homestead. Their chamberings piled onto the virtues.

Volcanic It is Not

The 1854 line honors the company's lever-action rifle legacy, but today's models are vastly different. They are built from materials unthought of in the 1800s, with CNC precision, and add modern safety features.

The 1854 Stealth Hunter receiver is constructed from stainless steel, which was developed well after the Volcanic was invented. The barrel is 410 stainless steel, is 16.3 inches long and threaded ⅝x24 for mounting muzzle devices. Rate of rifling is right-handed, one twist every 14 inches. A thread protector ships on the rifle.

The gun's exterior metal is flat black. It wears Smith & Wesson's Armornite finish, which improves resistance to wear and corrosion, yet increases surface lubricity. It's so effective at dampening reflection that rim lighting from behind for photos is the best way to see some of the rifle's fine details.

The "Stealth" name is well deserved, obviously. Mr. Wesson and Mr. Smith would be impressed with those improvements alone, but there's more.

Field Rugged Rear Stock

The polymer stock at the rear is field rugged and maintains that discrete, hard-to-see look. It's black and wears a sling swivel stud aft. Texturing in all the right places ensures a positive grip in wet conditions, or when wearing gloves. A generous recoil pad minimizes perceived recoil, although there wasn't much in the .357 Mag.-chambered model shipped for testing.

There are two Smith & Wesson logos on the stock, again, black. They are on the bottom of the stock and recoil pad. The company didn't compromise stealth with unneeded embellishment. Even the Smith & Wesson name on the barrel is understated black. The theme continues at the forend, one of the two most notable departures from a lever action's classic profile.



Overall length of the Stealth Hunter is 33.3 inches and it weighs 6.5 pounds.

The M-Lok Jackpot and Optic Mounting Rail

The rifle's forend is constructed from aircraft-grade T6 aluminum and, as expected, is flat black with matching finish. It's 10.5 inches long and features 15 M-Lok slots, five each on the 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions. The only white surface on the gun, the M-Lok logo, is found underneath the forend. It is ideal for mounting lights, lasers or a bipod and far forward on the unit is the rifle's second sling-mounting point. The system is a great advantage for today's shooters, although very different from tradition. There's another one that stands out just as much, if not more so.

Atop the receiver is a generous 10.5-inch Picatinny rail for optic mounting. At that length — with 25 grooves open if the factory-installed rear sight is removed — odds are good you'll find an ideal position, regardless of magnification or eye relief. I would have been tempted to try the gun out in a pseudo-scout-rifle setup if I had a 1-4X scope on hand.



The 10.5-inch Picatinny rail for optic mounting has 25 grooves if the rear sight is removed, providing plenty of room for eye relief regardless of the optic or magnification.

At that length, stretching well over the barrel, the rail is not integral to the receiver. Instead, it's affixed by three torx-head screws. The rear sight, which is easily removed, nestles into the rearmost pair of grooves in an innovative manner.

Iron Sights With a Twist

An XS Sights ghost ring with a 0.191-inch aperture serves as the rear sight. It's constructed from steel, and windage and elevation can be adjusted without removal.

Changing windage is simple and fast. Loosen one of the bolts on the sight's side, push the ghost ring over and tighten the opposite bolt. It's old-school, simple and unfailingly reliable. Elevation adjustment is equally fast and somewhat similar in approach to the A2 post on many AR-15s. Loosen both the mentioned bolts, rotate the ghost ring up or down, then retighten.



All that is required is a small flathead screwdriver.

A big part of the magic is underneath, though. The rear sight rides in a groove milled into the rail, like the footprint often milled into semi-auto pistol slides to mount red-dot optics. The design ensures there is no fore or aft movement, regardless of torture, and a single bolt keeps it firmly in place.

Owners who prefer a different diameter ghost ring can also order others from XS Sights. The sight picture, however, would be compromised unless something equally versatile rides up front on the barrel. It does. There a Hi Viz Litewave H3 sight makes target acquisition fast, regardless of light conditions. Its green fiber-optic tube is bright, even in low light. When things get really dark its tritium ring glows. The fact that the Litewave H3 line is extremely popular for home and self-defense speaks volumes. Of course, keeping the gun on target takes practice, form and a good trigger.

Trigger and Groups

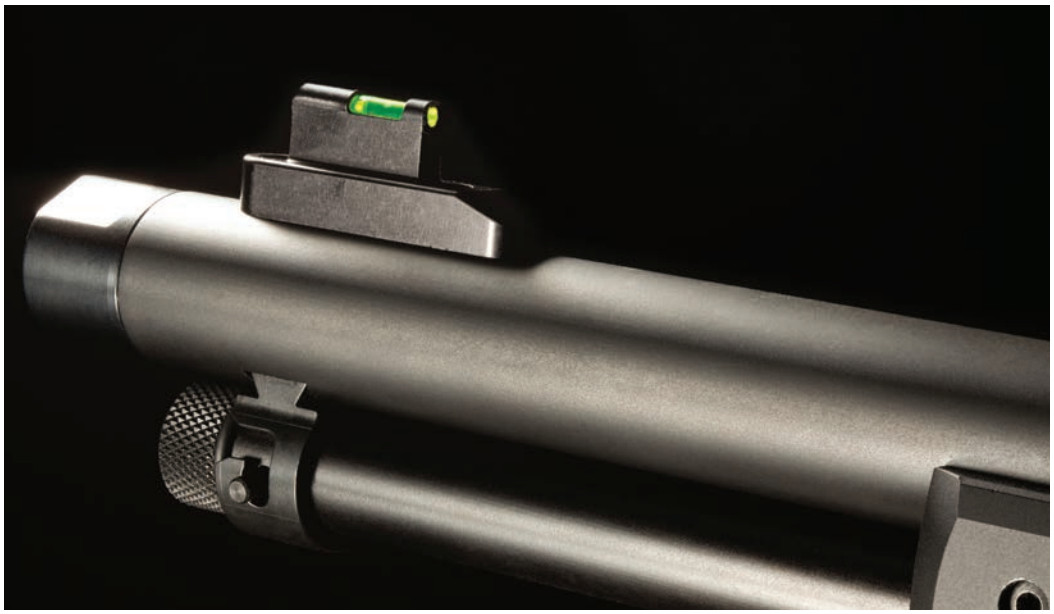
The trigger is grooved to minimize the chances of slip in nasty conditions or when wearing gloves. It's a single-stage design, and let-off weight — measured on a Lyman Digital Trigger Pull Gauge — averaged 4 pounds 2 ounces.

Long-distance is not where pistol cartridges shine, including the .357 Mag. Uncomfortable conditions during the first series of tests — with the iron sights on a muggy 100-degree day in North Carolina with scarcely a breeze — likely didn't help results optimal at 100 yards.



The single-stage trigger had a let-off weight of 4 pounds, 2 ounces. It's nicely textured to ensure a positive purchase in inclement conditions or when wearing gloves.

The Hi Viz Litewave H3 sight up front made target acquisition fast in testing and its tritium ring still points the way when light conditions dim.



Hornady's LEVERevolution 140-grain load printed the best five-groups — three shots each — at 100 yards. They averaged 3.16 inches from a sandbagged prone position. Federal's Hammer Down 170-grain load came in at 3.49 inches. American Eagle .38 Spl. 130-grain FMJ's were loaded one at a time (lead soft points were not available at the time) during the session just to gauge performance. Its groups swelled to 4.17 inches.

For a second test, Talley medium-height Tactical Picatinny scope rings were used to mount a Leupold 3.5-10x40mm VX-3HD scope. The rear and front sight were not visible in the optic, so they were not removed.

Shooting from the same prone position on a more comfortable, cloud-covered day, groups shrank. One of the Federal three-shot groups came close to the 2-inch mark, although Hammerdowns still averaged 2.73 inches — user-error, I suspect. Hornady's load trailed slightly this time at 2.91 inches.

There were no stoppages or malfunctions encountered during both range sessions. The rifle doesn't seem very finicky about bullet weight. Cycling the oversized lever loop was a breeze and as the barrel laps in, with practice, there's no doubt groups can shrink.

Manual Safety and Magazine

The Smith & Wesson 1854 Stealth Hunter has a crossbolt safety. When engaged it's possible to operate the lever to remove a chambered round. Some traditionalists find the safety an abomination on the receiver, but it's another touch with modern

SPEC SHEET

SMITH & WESSON 1854 STEALTH HUNTER

CHAMBERING:
.357 Mag. (tested); also available in .44 Mag. and .45-70 Gov't

METHOD OF OPERATION:
Lever action

OVERALL LENGTH:
33.3 inches

WEIGHT:
6.5 pounds (unloaded)

RECEIVER:
Stainless steel

TRIGGER LET-OFF WEIGHT:
4 pounds, 2 ounces

BARREL:
16.3 inches, 410 stainless steel, threaded 5/8 x 24

RECEIVER:
Stainless steel

RIFLING:
1:14 RH

STOCK:
Synthetic black with aluminum M-Lok compatible forend, synthetic buttstock

MAGAZINE:
Tube with eight-round capacity

ACCESSORIES:
Hammer spur extension, trigger lock and cable, manual and every rifle is covered by the Smith & Wesson Lifetime Service Policy

MSRP: $1,399

www.smith-wesson.com



The rear stock is polymer and black, living up to the Stealth Hunter name.

shooters in mind. A red ring appears on the mechanism when the gun is ready to fire.

The hammer also has a half-notch position to guard against accidental discharges. A hammer spur extension ships with the gun for owner installation, if wanted.

Pressing cartridges through a gate on the receiver's side — just below the ejection port — is the field-expedient and traditional method of reloading centerfire lever actions. When the day's over, and it's time to unload, many models require the lever to be operated until all cartridges are removed.

The 1854 has the option of turning the tube knob up front and removing the entire magazine, cartridge, spring, follower and tube. A single operation of the lever then removes anything that remains chambered. It's a great added layer of safety that doesn't require remaining cartridges to pass into and out of the chamber after the day is done. The system can even be used to reload, although it's slightly more cumbersome.

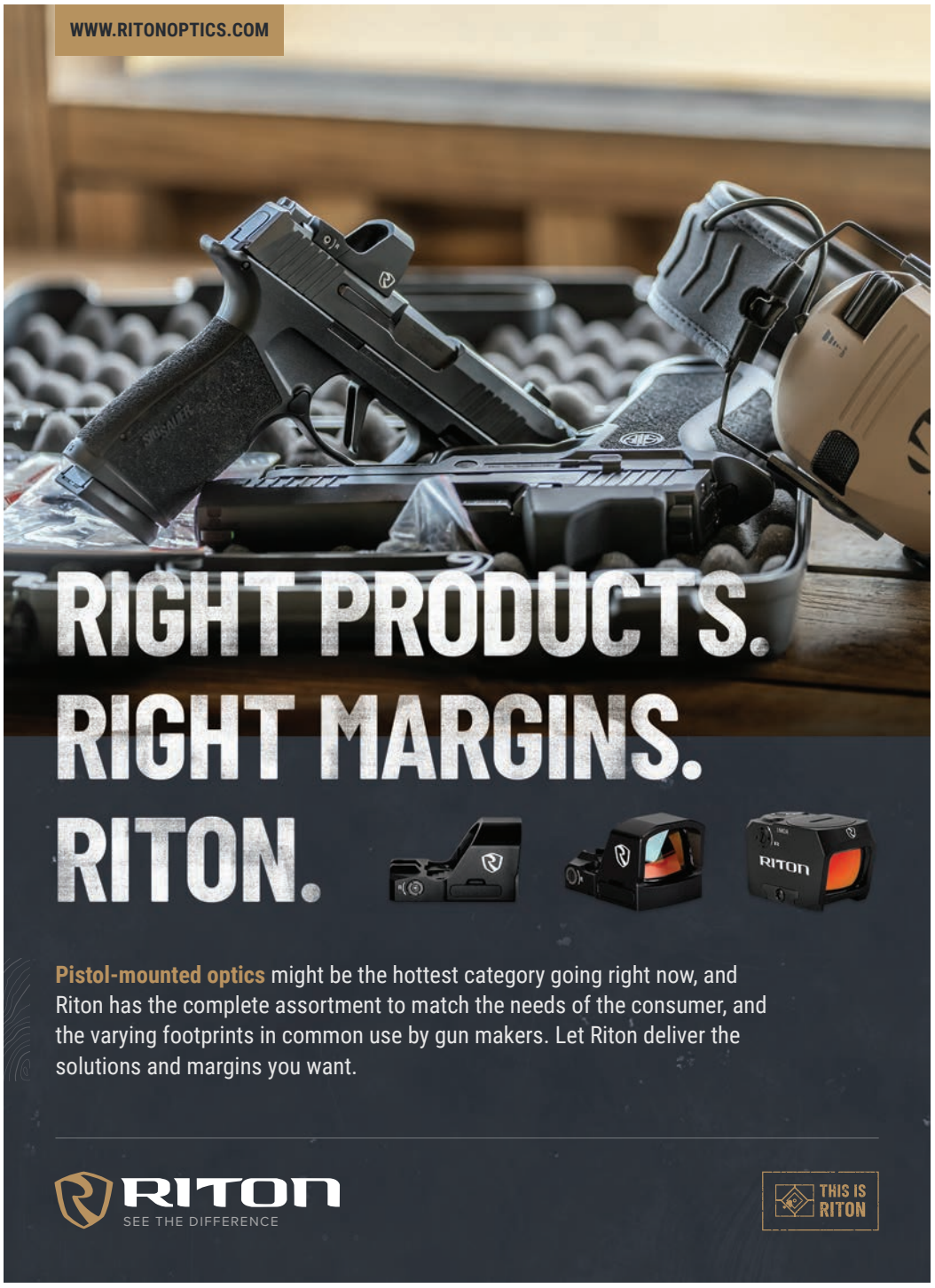


With a scope mounted, Federal Hammerdown loads averaged 2.73 inches at 100 yards.

Overall Impression

There's another consideration to weigh, perhaps the biggest one for many hunters. If you live in one of the states that has recently made straight-wall cartridges legal for taking big game, the 1854 Stealth Hunter qualifies.

For predator hunters it's a rifle that can do it all. The fact it also comes with modern features to deliver a decided advantage in the field, especially in thick brush or low light, is icing on the cake. Smith & Wesson has a winner in this rifle, one well worth a close look the next time you visit your favorite sporting goods dealer.



NIGHT MOVES

By Brian McCombie



X-Vision Impact 250 — A 384 Thermal Sensor That Really Holds Its Own

Nighttime hunters will appreciate the simplicity and effectiveness of this value-packed thermal riflescope.

BASED IN REDWING, MINNESOTA, X-VISION OPTICS SPECIALIZES IN NIGHT VISION AND THERMAL UNITS DESIGNED FOR NIGHTTIME PREDATOR HUNTERS. In 2024, the company debuted its Impact line of thermal riflescopes with the Impact 150, 250 and 350 models.

I had the opportunity to run the mid-level Impact 250. It sported a 384x288 thermal sensor, 50mm objective lens and numerous other features, such as HotSpot Tracking, Picture-in-Picture and 32 gigabytes of memory for photos and video captures.

With the Impact 250, I think it's time to admit that many units built with 384x288 thermal sensors are not what they were a half-dozen years ago. Then, 384 models were often bargain basement thermals. Oh, they would do the job, especially if the coyotes or hogs were close. Image quality would be sufficient, but not terribly detailed. Photos and videos? Maybe. But both would be grainy, and often you had only the photo option. Battery life? Bring a pocket full!

That's changed considerably, and the Impact 250 is one of those units proving that a 384 model can actually compete with the higher-end thermals. The Impact 250 will be a top choice for those hunters who want a high-quality unit without paying the $4,000 to $6,000 common with 640 sensor models.

Large Objective Lens

My test unit Impact 250 was very easy to zero, and was equipped with a full set of features and a menu system that provided complete accessibility to those features. The photos and videos I took were clear and nicely detailed, as were the images seen through the 250 in general.

X-Vision rated the Impact 250 thermal sensor as able to detect game animals past 2,200 yards, with a 725-yard recognition range. The 384 sensor is capable of detecting temperature differences as small as 0.05°F. The thermal also features 4.7X to 18.8X zoom magnification and a built-in stadia metric rangefinder.

The detection and recognition ranges of the unit were actually greater in both categories compared to the upper-level



The Impact 250's 50mm objective lens helps boost the thermal's magnification capabilities and detection range.



"M" is for Menu, with the Shutter button positioned just ahead.

Impact 350, even though the 350 features a 640x480 thermal sensor and is more expensive. Credit for the greater ranges, at least in part, can be attributed to that large 50mm objective lens, which allows a manufacturer to place the sensor somewhat farther back from the lens.

With the focal length increased, the unit's base level magnification is also increased. That's why the Impact 250 has a magnification level of 4.7X to 18.8X, while the 350 unit, with its 35mm objective, delivers 2X to 16X magnification. A larger objective also translates into more heat energy captured and sent back to the sensor, increasing the detection range.

Other Key Features

Images are displayed on a 1024 x 768 OLED screen. A diopter adjustment surrounds the rear lens/screen. The Menu knob sits atop the chassis. A short press brought up the Quick Start menu, a long press the Full menu. With a menu selected, turning the knob moved the selector along the available options; a press of the knob brought up the specific option.

Just forward of the Menu knob is the Shutter button. A single press took a photo. A long press started a video, another press stopping that recording.

As noted, this thermal features Picture-in-Picture (PIP) and Hotspot Tracking. The latter allows a hunter to lock onto and track heat signatures, ensuring that a moving target remains in sight. The PIP box zooms in on a target without losing sight of the broader picture.

An included single 18650 3.6v Lithium-Ion battery powers the unit. The battery is rechargeable, and a charger is included, too, as part of the 250 accessory package. Battery life is rated at eight hours with a full charge.

This thermal is built with a Picatinny mount already attached, and the 250 mounted to my AR-15 effortlessly. Thanks to its integrated Wi-Fi and photo/video capabilities, a hunter can record and share the hunt, though he or she will first have to download X-Vision's TargetIR app. The thermal can't download from unit to computer via a cable, which was a little disappointing.

The Initial Zero

I mounted the 250 onto a Bear Creek Arsenal BC-15 5.56mm NATO right side charging rifle.

Instead of the traditional AR charging handle located near the top of the receiver, the BC-15 features a charging handle protruding from the right side of the billet receiver. Otherwise, the rifle is pretty much a standard AR-15. It is equipped with a 16-inch chrome moly steel barrel with a 1:8 twist rate, a 15-inch M-Lok handguard and a carbine-length gas system. I'd used the BC-15 over the course of the past couple years, and it is accurate and highly functional. Just the kind of rifle I'd take on a night coyote hunt.

The conditions were overcast and 42 degrees at my outdoor range, 10 mph wind in my face.

For my zeroing target, I taped a large HotHands packet onto cardboard and set it up at 50 yards.

I loaded the BC-15 with Federal Premium American Eagle Varmint and Predator rounds in .223 Rem., launching 50-grain jacketed hollowpoints.

My first two shots impacted a full 11 inches to the right of my HotHands. Using the menu, I opened the zeroing application. Like most newer thermals, the Impact 250 features a one-shot zeroing system. Take your first shot or shots and then access the zero function. Keeping the rifle very still with the reticle on the target, you "freeze" the target image and then move the X and Y axis to where the initial shot(s) landed. The original reticle stays centered on the target, while the new X reticle slides over per your X and Y adjustments. Once in place, you save the location of this new X reticle, and the unit recalibrates itself for this new point of impact.

SPEC SHEET

X-VISION IMPACT 250 THERMAL SCOPE

SKU: 0203222

THERMAL SENSOR: 384 x 288

OBJECTIVE LENS: 50mm

MAGNIFICATION: 4.7X to 18.8X

DETECTION RANGE: 2,200 yards

DISPLAY RESOLUTION: 1024 x 768 OLED

BATTERY: Rechargeable 18650 3.6v Lithium-Ion

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours

PHOTO & VIDEO: Yes

RANGEFINDING: Yes

FRAME RATE: 50 Hz

FIELD OF VIEW: 60ft @ 100 yards

RECOGNITION RANGE: 725 yards

PIXEL SIZE: 12 µm

EYE RELIEF: 48mm

HOTSPOT TRACKING: Yes

PICTURE-IN-PICTURE: Yes

INTERNAL MEMORY: 32GB

RETICLE PATTERNS: 10

RETICLE COLORS: Six

THERMAL COLOR PALETTES: Six

IP RATING: IP67

MOUNT: Picatinny

DIMENSIONS: 8.62 x 3.46 x 2.59 inches

WEIGHT: 1.3 pounds

ACCESSORIES: Dual Battery Charger, Charger Cable, Short Sight Base, Lens Cloth, Rubber Eye Pieces, Lens Cap, One Battery, Carrying Case, Allen Wrench

MSRP: $3,999.99

www.xvisionoptics.com

A three-shot headache at 100 yards, compliments of X-Vision and Federal Premium.



"The Impact 250 sports one of the cleanest, most intuitive one-shot systems I've ever used."

The Impact 250 sports one of the cleanest, most intuitive one-shot systems I've ever used. Once I selected the zeroing function, a small box appeared on the lower right, showing my Zoom setting, the Freeze function and X and Y access, with a Cancel or OK tab at the bottom of the box. I simply selected On for the Freeze and then moved to the X and the Y settings, moving each until they overlaid my first shots. Then, I selected OK.

My next three shots hit the blue tape that surrounded the HotHands packet. Close but still a couple inches to the right. I went back into the zeroing function, adjusted X and Y, saved these changes and shot three times. The result was a 1.2-inch group, with two of the shots touching and centered on the HotHands packet. Some impressive zeroing precision.

I then moved to my 100-yard lane. My target here was a life-size coyote target. I taped a large HotHands over the heart-lung area and a small packet over the head.

First, I took some shots at a warmer spot on the coyote cardboard to check my zero at this distance. I was a little low and right and I made the needed adjustments. For the larger heat pad, my five shots came in at 1.2 inches. I then shot three times at the smaller heat pack overlaying the predator's head and all three hit for a 1.0-inch group. A quality thermal and a good AR can make some nights very tough on Mr. Coyote.

Night and Humidity

Humidity is not a friend of thermal optics and generally distorts images and reduces detection ranges. As it was a rainy 38 degrees the night I took out the Impact 250 for photo and video work, with gusting winds, I didn't expect images to be as sharp as they were at my range. This was the case, but not really all that bad.

For example, I spotted a trio of whitetail deer strung out on a cut-over alfalfa field. I knew the area very well, and estimated them to be from 250 to 400 yards out. The nearest deer stood out quite well even with the rain. The farthest away animal was less clear, but the head and neck were still very obvious, and ID-ing the heat signature as a deer was easy.

I took some still photos through the unit using my Apple 11 Pro cellphone camera and a very handy Magview S1 Mini spotting scope adapter attached to the rear of the unit. This digiscope product features a stainless-steel plate that folds out from the S1 cap. A stick-on magnet is included, and I attached it to the back of my cell. Then, all I had to do was line up the camera lenses with the center of the thermal's rear lens and affix the magnetized cell-to-steel plate.

The setup was initially awkward, but I quickly figured out the system and took some solid photos through the 250. The videos I took that night were clear and fairly detailed, even with the humidity degrading things a bit.

Hunt Ready

With a very durable chassis made of molded and machined aluminum and IP67 rating (water resistance at 3 feet for up to 30 minutes), as well as all the above-cited features and capabilities, the Impact 250 will be a top choice for the night hunter. Coyote hunters will especially like the higher zoom level attainable with this thermal. And, of course, as a thermal optic, the Impact 250 is ready to hunt day and night.



McCombie's rifle for testing, a Bear Creek Arsenal BC-15 with side charging handle.

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HUNTING SUBURBAN Predators

By Bob Robb

Suburban sprawl got you down? Here are some science-based tips on how coyotes live in human populated environments — and how to best hunt them there.

THAT COYOTES ARE ONE OF THE SMARTEST, MOST ADAPTABLE CRITTERS IN NORTH AMERICA IS NO SECRET. And unlike some wildlife species whose populations are threatened by continually expanding urban and suburban sprawl, in many instances coyotes are not only surviving but thriving in this ever-changing landscape. From coast to coast, north to south, they've established territories in parks, along golf courses and even in densely populated neighborhoods. Here they can find food, shelter and protection from creatures that prey on them — most notably humans.

I remember the first time I encountered suburban coyotes on a regular basis. Living on the beach in Huntington Beach, California, back in the late 1970s, I'd head off to work at first light driving along the beach-hugging Pacific Coast Highway. Many mornings I'd run into coyotes cruising next to PCH as they headed back into a large protected wetlands area bordered by beach houses. These encounters got me thinking, *How can I hunt these coyotes?*

As the years went by, I moved several times and started traveling the country to hunt. As I did so I started finding some really, really good coyote hunting near suburban communities. Having grown up in close proximity to people, these dogs were not nearly as *skookum* as those living in rural areas frequented by predator hunters, which made them susceptible to even my amateurish hunting and calling skills.

Studying Urban Coyotes

Perhaps the most comprehensive research study of urban coyotes is the ongoing Cook County Coyote Project (*www.urbancoyoteresearch.com*) initiated in 2000. Researchers continuously capture a subset of coyotes, then collar and release them at their capture site. They are then monitored to understand how they live in urban areas and how they interact with other wildlife, domestic animals and humans. During the summer of 2011, the Anthem Highlands neighborhood of the city and county of Broomfield, Colorado, experienced multiple serious incidents between humans and coyotes; in response, they initiated a study that offers more interesting insights.



E-callers loaded with the usual distress sounds of common resident prey species have worked very well for the author in suburban settings. Good callers will "match the hatch" he says.

"Travel routes are key. Since you cannot hunt the hub of the coyote's urban habitat — the park, golf course, etc. — you'll need to hunt the fringes. That means finding preferred travel routes between there and huntable lands, whether that is public ground or private land where you've gained permission to hunt."

So, what has this, and other research, told us about urban coyotes?

For one thing, even in an environment where they can feed on food scraps left by humans, in the Cook County study 42 percent of their diet consisted of rodents. Also, according to the study, when whitetail deer drop their fawns in spring, the coyotes hammer them, killing anywhere between 20 to 80 percent of the annual fawn crop depending on the region. They also eat a lot of cottontail rabbits, and those pesky, pooping ducks and geese that populate parks and golf courses get it, too, as do their eggs during the nesting season. They also will eat cats, both pets and those that have gone feral. Being omnivores, urban coyotes in Cook County also raid gardens for fruits and vegetables, with fruit accounting for more than 20 percent of their diet when it's available.

The study has also shown that urban coyotes maintain similar home territory characteristics of their wild brethren. The radio-collared coyotes have an average home territory size of about 3 square miles when living in a communal (pack) setting,

but this expands to up to 25 square miles for solitary animals. In other words, they live a life similar to rural coyotes, adapting their movements and habits depending upon the season, as well as the availability of food, shelter and environmental conditions.

Exploring Suburban Hunting Options

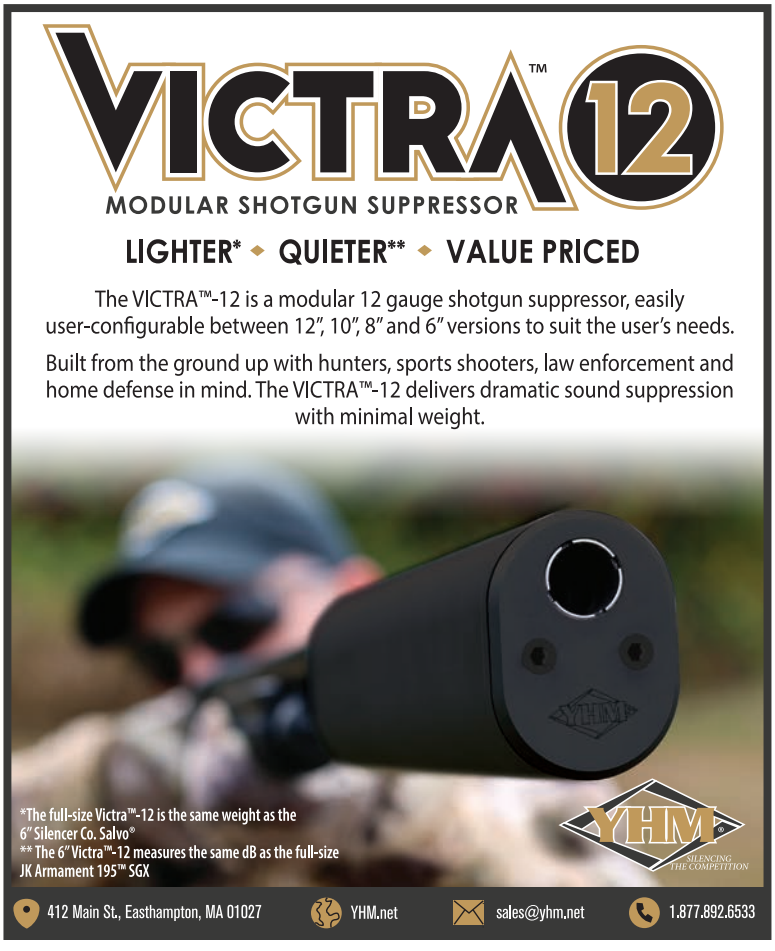
As suburbia expands, it draws a cross section of the population to live there. There will be hunters, non-hunters, anti-hunters and those who never give it a thought moving in. As such, one needs to tread lightly when thinking about setting up a stand site close by.

The first step is to make sure that nearby vacant land is actually open to hunting. A city's boundaries can extend farther than you might think. A county might have ordinances against hunting, or specific laws regarding the discharge of firearms, including distance from buildings or near or across roads, and if any caliber or centerfire restrictions are in place. You might be surprised to find centerfire rifles are not allowed, but archery equipment (including a scope-sighted crossbow, my current favorite), shotguns, muzzleloaders or airguns might be legal. Many of these governments have dealt with the issue of burgeoning deer herds and have implemented hunting regulations to deal with the urban deer. State laws might even be different for hunting on state or federal land vs. hunting in what is considered an urban or semi-urban environment.

When you find areas that appear promising — and you can do so from home using OnX or HuntStand apps, for example, or by doing basic internet research — try calling the local animal control officer or game warden. These folks will be familiar both with relevant legalities, as well as where concentrations of urban coyotes can be found. A local gun shop, hunting store or gun or archery club might have employees or members with valuable information. If you're polite and lucky, they might even share it with you.



As farmland is developed into housing tracts, small farms that remain in operation are great places to hunt predators if you can gain permission.







Golf courses and adjacent homes are ideal coyote and bobcat habitat. This big tom is strolling past a backyard bird feeder.

"Secret" Spots

Once I figure out the legalities and have spoken with locals in the know, I now have some idea on where to begin. I then start looking for two key starting points — public lands open to hunting and farmland in and around expanding developments. Here are two examples.

For many years, my wife Cheryl and I lived in a large retirement community north of Tucson, Arizona. The development was centered around three golf courses, which featured a constant water source, "No Hunting" signs and large populations of rabbits, deer, rodents, quail, songbirds and other tasty morsels the local coyotes and bobcats loved. It was bordered by both state trust and federal lands that were open to hunting.

The surrounding public desert sprawled in all directions, and the local predator hunters pounded it. But the areas adjacent to the development that were accessible only by hiking several miles into roadless tracts were untouched. It was here where I killed several coyotes by entering and exiting undetected by the locals. I'd hike into my spots in the dark well before first light, carrying typical hiking clothes to change into before hiking out in my large frame pack that also carried my e-caller and my take-down air rifle or short-barreled Remington Model 870 — and hunt at dawn. This is an ideal situation, because all wildlife is drawn to the golf course's water, food and protection.

Other excellent possibilities are areas that have been farmland for generations, but are slowly being developed into housing tracts that include both high-density housing as well as ranchettes of 1 to 5 acres. In such areas many farming operations remain, and this mix of habitat can be heaven for coyotes and bobcats that find lots of food, water, cover and little, if any, hunting pressure. Where I live now some of the local farmers who don't allow hunting for deer, upland birds or waterfowl will permit limited access for hunting the coyotes that harass their domestic cattle, goats and chickens.

Travel routes are key. Since you cannot hunt the hub of the coyote's urban habitat — the park, golf course, etc. — you'll need to hunt the fringes. That means finding preferred travel routes between there and huntable lands, whether that is public ground or private land where you've gained permission to hunt. Drainage ditches, blocks of timber, freshly cleared land with big dozer piles, and so on are great places for predators to travel between their food and water sources and huntable lands where they can sleep the day away undisturbed.

Call 'Em Up

One thing I learned about this game is that you don't have to be Big Al Morris or Garvin Young or win a world calling championship to successfully call suburban coyotes. Since they're generally hunted very little, they're probably uneducated, too. Rabbit distress and rodent squeaks are my basic go-to calls. In some locales I might add some quail calls, or a meadowlark in distress, or woodpecker sounds. And since all good callers like to "match the hatch," a kicker in this environment can be the sounds of domestic cats, puppies crying, chickens clucking and even goats braying.

Regardless, I keep my calling low and subtle. They might be city clickers and they might be unhunted, but coyotes are still coyotes, so start off slow and low. The only education I want to give them is the last sound they'll ever hear — the sound of a shot.

Final Thoughts

The first time I pulled off one of my suburban stealth hunts still makes me smile. I'd seen coyotes regularly near my golf course home, and had a good idea where

they spent the day on the adjacent public lands. I loaded up my pack and, with the wind blowing from the 9th fairway up into the mountain, I made a wide circle up the slope, then fish-hooked around into position on a semi-open sagebrush flat so the breeze was wafting up into my face. I changed into my camo, slipped up over a knob and set up. It was dead calm, and when I could barely see I started a soft calling sequence, using rodent squeaks, transitioning to a dying rabbit sequence 15 minutes later.

It wasn't 30 minutes after first light when the big dog showed himself, coming right for me. At 50 yards I tuned him up with a load of buckshot from a Model 870 I'd had since college. The nearest house was a quarter-mile away, and the thousands of local residents had no idea I was on the planet.

I was hooked. And why not? I'd figured out how to have excellent coyote hunting in an area not polluted by other hunters that, if I didn't overhunt it, would be golden seemingly forever. And no one was the wiser. Does it get any better?



A silent but very deadly crossbow makes an excellent predator hunting weapon when setting up adjacent to suburban environments. The residents will never know you're there.













AT CLOSE QUARTERS

By Andrew Lewand

Sometimes getting close and personal with coyotes will help seal the deal.

IT WAS MIDNIGHT WHEN I ARRIVED AT ONE OF MY FAVORITE CALLING SPOTS AND SENT A TRIO OF MALE COYOTE HOWLS FROM MY FOXPRO THROUGH THE CRISP DECEMBER AIR. Instantly, a pair of coyotes responded with a vigorous serenade. Although this was good news, it was not great, because the coyotes were too far off in the distance for my liking. To continue to call from my current position would be time-consuming and potentially fruitless. Luckily, I had permission to hunt four of the next five properties in line from where the coyotes were howling. I quickly broke down the stand and headed for my truck to cut the distance between me and the vocal pair of canines.

Based upon the sound of the howling, I chose to set up at the third property and start with a lone male howl. To my delight, the coyotes howled again, and this time they were on the property right next door (yes, the one I did not have permission to hunt!). I howled once more and followed it up with rabbit distress sounds. It took only a minute for the pair of coyotes to race to my remotely placed e-caller. Even in my adrenaline-drenched state, I dropped one of them on the spot. The second coyote vacated the scene unscathed. That was alright by me. I had just experienced an epic hunt, which was filled with everything a coyote hunter could ask for.

Although the approach, setup, calling and marksmanship were on point during this hunt, the most important element was that I re-located on the vocal coyotes. There was a need to get close to the coyotes to tip the scales of success in my favor.



If coyotes do not approach your calling efforts, it might be a wise decision to move closer to trigger a response.

Moving on Distant Coyotes

While it's fun to hear coyotes howling during a hunt, hearing them howl in the distance can pose a problem. Perhaps English rockers The Clash said it best with their lyrics, "Should I stay, or should I go?" In this situation, every hunter must decide what to do. In the hunt I just described, I was fortunate that I had access to most of the surrounding properties. Because the coyotes sounded so far away, relocating was the best decision.

The time of year might sway your decision on whether to move or stay put. If you are hunting during spring or summer, coyotes might not travel great distances to come to the call because they are holding tight to denning areas. In this scenario, hunters should move closer to the coyotes early in the stand. During fall and winter hunts, hunters might want to give the coyotes more time to approach, knowing they will tend to cover more ground during these times of year. My field experience shows that it takes a coyote about seven minutes to travel 1 mile to the call. If coyotes do not approach within 15 minutes, moving to a new location might be worthwhile.

Closing distance on howling coyotes does not only apply to those that are far off in the distance. Proximate coyotes that vocalize but hold their ground can be successfully called in. In this case, closing the distance can be the trigger to make them approach. According to Torry Cook from MFK Game Calls, coyotes might not respond to coyote vocals that are made from 400 yards away. However, the same vocals made from 200 yards can result in a coyote approaching the scene.

Cook also explains that the decision of how far to move is a variable factor. "The answer is dependent upon how thick the cover is. Sometimes, I get within 75 yards of where the coyotes are located … if the cover is extremely thick." Torry said, "I will move closer any time I get a vocal response and the coyotes do not show up within five minutes, so long as the wind and cover allow me to do so."

Midday Tactics

A growing number of hunters are trying their luck at hunting the midday shift for coyotes. Although this period is often a time of rest for these canines, calling can be productive, and the concept of closeness relates to success. Foxpro's Marc Larese is known for his midday prowess, so I asked him to share some insight on how closeness relates to his hunting.

Marc emphasized that he, "Absolutely has to get close to the coyotes because they are generally bedded at this time." He added, "Coyotes will trigger easier when they think the prey, or another coyote — if I am using coyote vocalizations — is not very far away."

I asked Marc to define "close" in this situation, and he said, "Around 100 yards. If you try to get too close, say 50 yards, you run the risk of spooking the coyotes." Larese looks for fields next to shaded creek-bottoms as his favorite close-quarters setup locations. If no creek-bottoms are in the area, he then looks for the thickest, brushiest hillsides to use as a calling location.

Although Larese is setting up in fields close to the thick cover, he does not expect coyotes to come racing out of the



Adjust the e-caller volume accordingly when making tight setups. If the sounds are echoing loudly off surrounding trees, the volume level is likely too high.

brush and run across the fields as they approach. Instead, he says that 80 percent of the time, the coyotes stand at the edge of the cover. It is enough exposure to be vulnerable, but they typically do not come running out into the wide open. Due to this behavior, hunters should pay close attention to their scent cone and scan the surrounding cover with their eyes. Unnecessary movement must be minimized to avoid being picked off by the coyotes. Believe it or not, using a hand-held thermal scanner, typically a tactic used during nighttime hunts, can assist hunters in spotting midday coyotes that stay just inside the wood line.

Nighttime Scanning Tactics

Typically, when night hunting, hunters like to set up in wide open areas so they can see the predators approaching from a great distance. This allows them to prepare for the shot mentally and physically. However, all setups are not created equal, and many times this means hunting in close quarters! While doing so, hunters should adjust their scanning tactics, whether they are using thermal units or traditional lights, to fit the terrain.

The speed of scanning should be faster when hunting close-quarters setups versus wide-open spaces. The rationale is that a predator can appear at any moment, and the hunter wants to see it as quickly as possible when hunting a close-quarters setup. The idea is to see the predator before it sees you so you can take a manageable shot. Conversely, when hunting wide open spaces, scanning can be done more slowly because predators will typically be detected at a greater distance and there should be plenty of time to prepare for the shot. Remember this tactic the next time you are hunting different types of calling locations.

Volume Issues

Another factor to consider when hunting close quarters is call volume. Calling styles vary from one hunter to the next, and call volume selection is part of this variation. It does seem safe to say that most hunters attempt to sound realistic while making their stands. A valid tactic to employ in tight conditions is to start your sequence using a low volume level. Doing so avoids sounding unnaturally loud to any predators that are in nearby cover. The volume level can be gradually increased throughout the stand to reach out to the predators that might be farther away.

As a rule, if your sounds are echoing loudly off surrounding trees, your sound level might be too high. There will be no harm in starting your calling off at sound level "0" and increasing volume to the point where it sounds natural, as opposed to starting a sound too loudly and potentially spooking a nearby predator.

Length of Stand

How long a hunter stays on stand can sometimes be dictated by the terrain. Close-quarters setups are frequently, but not always, associated with small land tracts. In these situations, the predators are either present or not. Hence, the length of the stand can be shorter than when hunting vast areas.

It stands to reason that it should take a shorter time for a predator to appear at a hunter's setup because it does not have to travel as far to get there. You can gauge your stand length by the size of the area you are calling. It should take a predator three to four minutes to travel a half-mile. If you play three to four different sounds, as a means of triggering a predator to approach, most close-quarters stands need not be over 12 to 14 minutes in duration.



The author often refrains from using a motion decoy when calling in tight setups, because predators often run in aggressively and negate a manageable shot opportunity.



Scouting efforts reveal information, such as this literal highway of predator tracks, that dictate where hunters should concentrate their calling efforts.

The Moment of Truth

No matter what happens between arriving at your calling spot and putting some fur in your truck, the most important ingredient of the hunt is the shot. As I often say, there is a big difference between calling in a predator and calling in a predator and killing it! When hunting close quarters, there are many things a hunter can do to make sure the shot is successful.

The first thing to consider is firearms choice. Under certain circumstances, a shotgun might be the best choice. As far as getting on a target quickly, it's hard to beat. Some hunters carry both a rifle and a shotgun to their setups. However, that is not my style, because I am already bogged down with my other gear. I typically carry one firearm, and that is a bolt-action rifle. Do I sometimes have foxes and coyotes run right past me and I cannot take a shot? The answer is "Yes," and I will have to live with those outcomes. I do take solace in the fact that there are several things rifle hunters can do to be successful when shooting at close range.

First, try to anticipate predator approach routes while setting up. Of course, playing the wind will be paramount. Be diligent so your scent is not blowing toward areas of cover that might be holding predators. Position your firearm so the muzzle is aimed toward the area where you believe predators are most likely to approach. While they can show up anywhere, it is a good bet that it will show up, or move to, an area downwind of the call.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (required by Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

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Mark Larese cites midday as his favorite time to hunt coyotes, and he does it by getting close to where coyotes are resting.

Pay close attention to any openings in hedgerows or lane ways in the area. Also, the inside and outside corners of woodlots seem to be popular spots for predators to show up. Being prepared will result in less motion as you attempt to shoot. If you are surprised by the sudden arrival of a predator and must re-adjust your firearm, do it smoothly. Both foxes and coyotes are masters of detecting motion. Moving your firearm steadily and slowly will diminish your chances of being detected.

A common debate among hunters is whether to mute the sound on an e-caller when a predator is approaching. I have always advocated for playing sounds throughout the predator's approach. That was until I started hunting close-quarters setups. After a few mishaps, I realized I must adapt to achieve success. Many times, the predators were racing to the call so quickly that I could not take a manageable shot. However, when the sound was muted, the predators would tend to slow their approach as they searched for the source of the sound (not all the time, mind you). During this hesitation, the shot must be taken because the predators might not stick around.

TORRY COOK'S TOP 5 TIPS FOR HUNTING IN CLOSE-QUARTER TERRAINS

No. 1 — Always use crosswinds, or winds in your face, while hunting in tight cover. Downwind setups do not work well due to limited visibility.

No. 2 — Use edges such as changes in cover types, creeks, rivers, roads, fields, etc. to help guide coyotes to your position.

No. 3 — Place the e-caller offset and upwind of your position, preferably using a crosswind, to guide coyotes into shooting range.

No. 4 — Set up and be prepared to move closer to coyotes when hunting thick cover as they typically will not come as far as open-ground coyotes.

No. 5 — Look for setups that allow for combining Tips 2 and 3 for the highest odds when calling tight cover.

Conclusion

At first, the notion of "getting close" might seem like a simple affair, but in reality, it can be rather complex. The tactics discussed, with thanks to Torry Cook and Marc Larese, can be used during any hunt that requires hunters to alter their traditional wide-open calling tactics. Put this information to use the next time you are hunting, and you might find the coyotes right where you want them ... at your feet!



Although close-quarters setups might lack the impressive vistas commonly associated with predator calling, the results can be just as rewarding.

LESSONS LEARNED, SKILLS ACQUIRED

By Mark Kayser

There's a lesson in each and every hunting experience that leads to becoming a master at the coyote-taking craft. Here are five prime examples.



LIFE IS AN EXTENDED STAY IN SCHOOL. IF YOU THINK LONG ENOUGH ABOUT IT, YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DAY. The same phenomenon occurs while coyote hunting. Every setup provides a different twist and when you break it down, on the spot or later, you learn something from every calling experience. When you tally your years of coyote hunting, the lessons you learn make you a better hunter, hopefully. The following tips offer a snippet of the hunts that crafted me into a modestly successful coyote hunter. Lessons learned.



If you hunt out of your normal area and tag along with a local, listen to their advice, because it could be helpful based on their experiences.

No. 1: Listen to the Locals

"Pull in here. Do you see that grain bin? We can set up there and call the coyotes across the corn stubble," my Kansas hunting pal directed. This all occurred in the predawn light, as I glanced over my shoulder at the highway less than 300 yards from the location where he fully expected a coyote to show up. Morning commuter traffic was already beginning to hum past with headlights blazing.

"Won't the coyotes be leery about running toward a highway?" I asked him. He assured me he was right (a common practice) and that I wasn't the expert (also a common comment). I ate humble pie to avoid 30 minutes of debate, and we trudged to the giant tin can to set up. That's when I noticed a stack of round bales farther along the field edge and suggested we climb into those for elevation because the bin sat in a low spot in the field. After quickly being shut down again, I fully assumed my guest role and nodded in agreement after every question thereafter.

Ten minutes into the setup, my buddy whispered, "Coyote." A shadowy figure had slipped from an adjoining hedgerow to survey the scene and listen to the sounds of distress. With the coyote on my partner's side, I ranged it at 200 yards and his Bergara .22-250 Rem. cracked with the solid sound of a hit. The big male hit the dirt within sight of a county highway, now whirring with rural workers headed to the city.

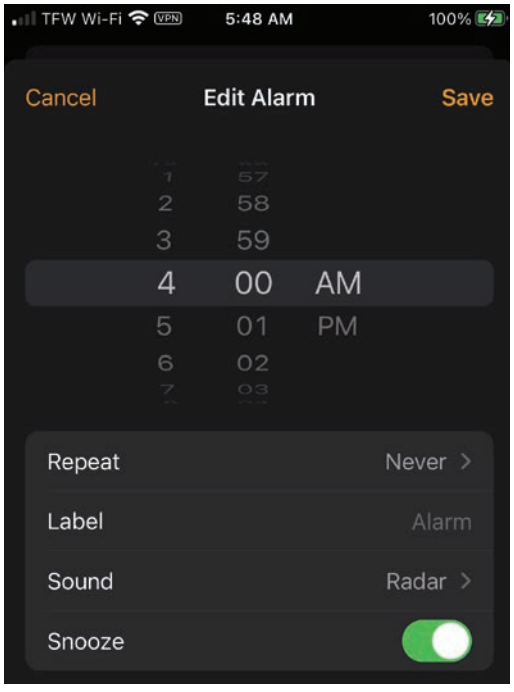
Lesson Learned — Over decades of hunting, I've learned its best to listen before giving your opinion, in business and hunting. Typically, locals have experience in their ZIP-code wheelhouse. Animals react differently in different environments, and although I would rarely call near a highway, my hunting partner had experience with this location and several others. The coyotes were more comfortable with the busy rural landscape, plus some locations have a glutton of coyotes providing more ears to hear your calls. I just needed to listen to the local advice.

No. 2: Be the Early Bird

I have always been an early riser so don't be surprised if I text or email you at 3 a.m. It hit home on a recent public-land coyote hunt. A big expanse of sagebrush canyons held hunting opportunities for deer, pronghorn and upland game. I knew it also held coyotes.

It was mid-October with numerous seasons open, and I knew the public land would get busy soon after sunrise. To beat a public-land, Black Friday style of event, I rose early and arrived at the public access point more than an hour before shooting light. With the moon illuminating a path, I trekked more than a mile to reach a series of deep canyons connected to private land below where coyotes nocturnally hunted. Before dawn, they beat a path back up the canyons into the rough country for refuge — where I'd be waiting.

Hoping for a canine confrontation, I set out a Montana Decoy Company Sitting Coyote decoy 75 yards to my right and kept my decoy dog Sully beside me for further provocation. Ten minutes into a series of howls that included a challenge howl, a pair of coyotes raced off the canyon wall to my position. One held up while an aggressive coyote crossed the canyon right into our



Arrive on stand early, especially when hunting public lands that could see additional hunting pressure from all sorts of game pursuits.

trap. He spied the decoy and then Sully, thought twice and was about to leave when a V-Match ended the escape.

As I gathered up the coyote for a quick photo album memory, shots rang out above me. With my binocular I spied a pair of pointers followed by several blaze orange upland hunters. A busy day on public land had begun.

Lesson Learned — Most people don't have the motivation to get up super early. Oh, they rise and shine, but few appreciate walking through the wilds in the dark. They would much rather hike to a hunting area with dawn breaking and not under moonlight. Whether it's hunting deer, elk or coyotes, I try to beat the average hunter into public lands by a minimum of 30 minutes and oftentimes by an hour. This way I can get one good set in before possibly being disturbed and have the rest of the day to craft a hunting plan, or even get back to work.



Having a panoramic view of your calling area ensures that you stand a good chance of getting a shot at any coyotes coming to your calls — even if they venture downwind.

No. 3: Best Seat in the House

"Let's set up here. We can see nearly everything," my long-time hunting partner and past mentor directed. How could I argue? The clear day allowed us to see a long way, and the road where we parked my truck, likely would act as a deterrent for coyotes approaching from the opposite direction. Still, one narrow yet shallow gully leading downhill for hundreds of yards caused me to pause. Would a coyote actually run the entire length of that eroded terrain feature to reach our calls?

My mentor had more years than me at this point regarding coyote hunting experience, but I also had seen my share of cagey coyotes. More than once I barely stopped calling to be shocked by yellow eyes already staring at me almost within archery range.

I sat back and listened to my friend work through a series of sounds any coyote would consider risking a peek to appraise the prey provisions. The first few minutes ticked by without action, and I slowly rotated for an over-the-shoulder look. Slight movement from my partner brought my attention front and center. Bearing down on our position was a coyote about to hit "Top Gun: Maverick" mach 10 speed. Until it was 15 yards out, it had run the entire length of the depression in stealth mode. In an unarguable act of elite marksmanship, my pal hit the coyote squarely with a .22-250 Rem. roadblock. The coyote skidded to a halt at our feet.

Lesson Learned — Coyotes, particularly veterans, acquire a remarkable skill of traveling out of sight when in the mood. Choose your setup site accordingly. Not only do you need to consider coyotes approaching from a downwind position, you also need to evaluate every terrain feature with a coyote mindset. Will a coyote be able to approach and even wind you without you ever seeing it? Using a vetted hunting app, such as HuntStand, aids you in analyzing terrain beforehand, and when you acquire a firsthand look, do your best to have the best seat in the house so coyotes have a bad day.

"Most people don't have the motivation to get up super early. Oh, they rise and shine, but few appreciate walking through the wilds in the dark. They would much rather hike to a hunting area with dawn breaking and not under moonlight."

No. 4: … Till the Fat Lady Sings

Kneeling, I scanned around my setup site and picked up hand calls, a glove and my rangefinder and methodically began putting them in my pack and pockets after an hour of calling. Reaching down, I grabbed the bolt of my Bergara to eject the round in the chamber when a gray apparition appeared in my peripheral vision. Slowly, I twisted my head in the direction of the ghost to shockingly discover a coyote looking for the maker of the earlier noise. It was a latecomer to the party, but despite its dawdling personality, it represented a fur-taking opportunity.

Still as a statue, I waited for the coyote's next move. When it moved behind

a particularly large yucca I eased into the prone position. The coyote sensed my motion, but still in investigative mode, stopped to evaluate. That was a bad decision, as I punched a V-Max hole through its vitals.

Not only have I scored a win while packing up at a calling site, I have punched fur on the walk in and out many times. One afternoon, I walked along a snowy hillside toward a valley for calling. Glancing up the hill occasionally, I hesitated at a glimmering object. Lifting my binocular, I couldn't believe my luck. It was a napping coyote! A quick shift to a nearby berm gave me benchrest stability to wake the coyote, albeit for only an instant!

Lesson Learned — Never give up your vigilance until you finally get back to a trailhead or your vehicle. I've lost track of the number of times I picked up an extra coyote simply by still-hunting into and out of areas. You might encounter an inadvertent coyote, a slowpoke or even an oddball nosey coyote uneducated in the ways of the bullet. Regardless, the hunt ends only when you have your shooting iron stowed away.



You can sometimes get too involved in using an electronic caller. Remember, a simple message is sometimes the best message.

No. 5: Simple Equals Real

"You're not a DJ at a dance club," I hissed to my hunting partner beside me. He slyly smiled, as he switched to yet another sound on his expensive, new electronic caller. I couldn't argue the realism of the sounds radiating from the high-quality speakers. I just questioned whether changing tunes too often during the set sent a confusing message to coyotes, especially those that had already been pressured over the long winter.

We did not call in any coyotes that afternoon. The next morning, I asked my hunting partner if I could do the first set. He obliged, and I started out with a simple chorus of lone coyote howls. The brief serenade was meant to announce to any coyotes in the area that a visitor was looking for social interaction. Whether a coyote took that as a friendly invitation or a threat was up to them. Ten minutes later, I added the ruckus of gathering crows to the ruse and real crows flocked in to see what the squabble was about. So did a snooping coyote. I whispered to my buddy, "Coyote," as I settled the crosshairs on its shoulder. When it stopped to scan several crows passing overhead, I depressed the trigger.

Lesson Learned — I don't blame my hunting partner for trying to masterfully deceive coyotes with a symphony of nature's sounds. Nevertheless, I feel that sometimes simple is better. Coyotes that have run to calls and worked unseen downwind to detect hunters, or possibly experienced a near miss, might not be as ambitious to respond to the same prey-in-distress calls. A short series of howls, crow calls, magpie chatter, jay fighting or other ubiquitous sounds could be more effective. On many occasions, I have used unsophisticated sounds of birds, coyotes and other game species to lure in a coyote burned out on DJ music.

THE COYOTE NOSE KNOWS BEST

Try these tips for getting by a coyote's No. 1 defense.

I take my coyote hunting as seriously as I do my pursuits for deer and elk. These species survive with the use of their olfactory security system, but I feel coyotes rank even higher in the nose superiority category. My initial blow to a coyote's defense system begins with a thorough washing of my hunting clothing. My Muddy Outdoors TRX hunting attire gets a rinse using Wildlife Research Center's Scent Killer Gold Ultra-Concentrated Detergent Strips. No measuring. No liquid mess. Just drop a strip in with your clothing for convenience, especially while traveling.

Next, I liberally spray all my scent-collecting hunting gear with Scent Killer Gold spray. Hunt Dry Technology Plus provides 99 percent protection even after 20 days. I use it on my backpack, gun slings, hats and, of course, as more protection on every layer of clothing that accompanies me while in the field.

Lastly, keep in mind that coyotes have more than 220 million olfactory receptors in their nose. You have only 5 million. Use their superpower to your advantage with a good dousing of coyote urine. It works great to pause coyotes in openings they might use to circle downwind and out near your electronic caller as a stop sign. When they hit the brakes, bang. End of story. To keep scent concentrated, utilize felt-style wicks for soaking purposes and place them at coyote nose level, or even higher to spread the odor over a larger area. For more information, visit www.wildlife.com and *www.gomuddy.com*.

— Mark Kayser

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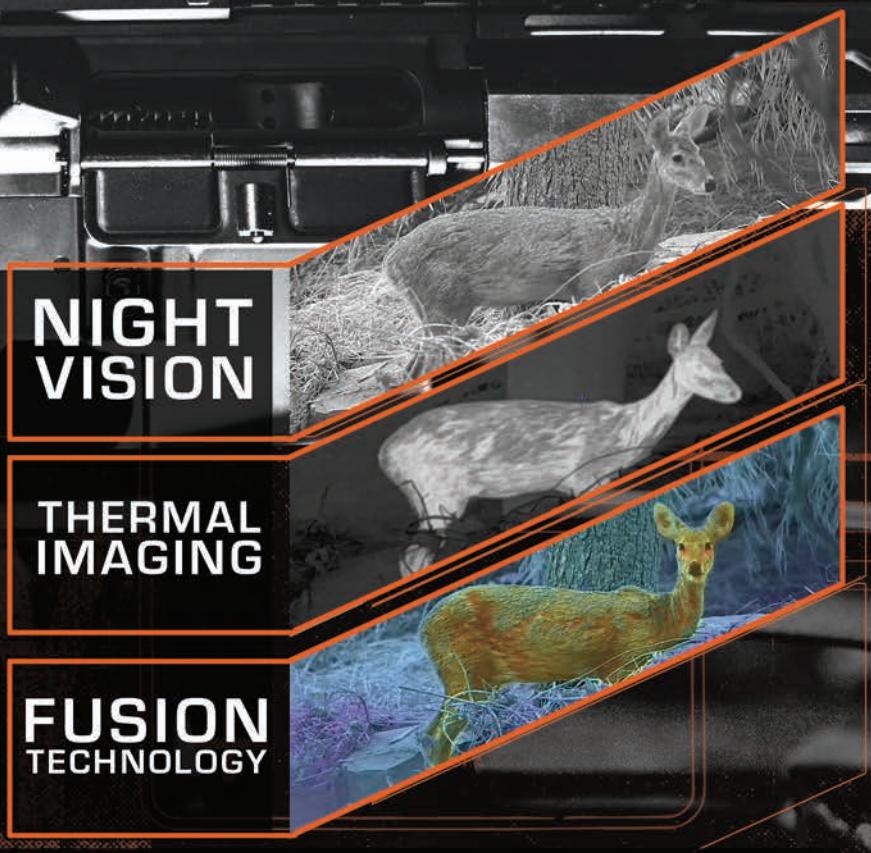


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SEE WHAT OTHERS DON'T

By Wayne van Zwoll

Shooting is only a small part of hunting.
Finding is the main thing. To find, you must learn to see.

AS "HUNTING" IS PRETTY MUCH SEEKING OR SEARCHING, HUNTERS SHOULD BE SOMEWHAT SKILLED AT IT. After all, that's what they do. But the measure of success in any search is in the finding. You can't be good at looking for something if, more often than not, you don't find it.

I'm not a good hunter. Mostly I miss seeing animals I want very badly to find. Quail, for instance. Closing within feet of a white setter that's visible at two kilometers, I look where it is looking. No quail. Dog insists. Another step, and my boot is darned near brushing its nose. *Nada*. The snarl of weeds is no bigger than a house salad. I kick it anyway, to show Dog he's wrong. He's not. My missing with both barrels sends him off on a sulk. Like other bird hunters, I've overlooked even crouching roosters, painted as only the Chinese can.

This past fall, a lad failed to spot a deer catching early sun on an open prairie against retreating shadows — though, pointing, I shoved my elbow against his cheek. "Right *there*!"

Few hunters, however, have bumbled into a rhinoceros. I have. Just shy of contact. The bush was neither thick nor poorly lit. Had the beast come instead of gone, it would have flattened me in two steps. Actually, flattened *us*. "Close one, that." My companion was a professional hunter, someone paid to see animals before his clients did. "If we were hunting rhinos, I'd owe you an apology."

All animals can evade detection in cover. A coyote hiding behind basalt is no less present; the rock simply blocks our view. Distance can do the same thing. A fox a couple of miles off can stare back from the skyline without revealing itself. While in good light a healthy human eye can distinguish detail to a minute of



Off-ridge looks across draws into pockets of cover can reveal game. Limit glassing beyond rifle range.

angle, it can't unfailingly make an animal from a piece that small.

Creatures as dim as pheasants, with an average life-span of nine months, learn that hiding from hunters entails less risk than jumping up to escape them. They seem to know the human sense of smell is worthless, that hunters hurry when they look and will more likely pass by than spot them. Larger game, aware hunters avoid thickets, have honed hiding to a fine art. They see but are not seen, natural features in front and behind breaking up their profiles and obscuring all but shards that don't readily register as parts of a whole. Animals with good noses and ears track hunter progress around them without bringing their heads off the ground. One buck in a tiny patch of scrub let me hunt past a fly-rod length away. I saw him with a lucky glance back.

Camouflage blesses some creatures, mostly small ones — toads and moths, for example. Oddly, few big mammals are boldly patterned. Zebras, leopards and tigers come to mind. In photographs, their striking appearance seems hardly in keeping with camo. Black spots on bright yellow, black stripes on orange and white? Where could *they* blend in? Well, just about anywhere. A leopard can be as hard to see in tan grass or green bush, or against slate-hued rock, as in forest's dappled shade. Depending on their angle to the sun, zebras on open veldt may not appear striped.

Markings steal our eye from the profile of a motionless animal. Movement upstages color and contrast; dust obscures both. A lion craving zebra might be momentarily confused by a tide of stripes racing by.

Built to Blend

Deer and elk, and some of Africa's big antelopes — kudu, eland, waterbuck, blue wildebeest, red hartebeest — have white or black highlights but are mostly solid brown, gray or russet. Ditto predators, from coyotes to lions. A motionless bobcat can appear as small earth-colored patches against background not much different. Creases of muscle and bone, and the brushwork of hair become background, too.

Sometimes it's helpful to look between and beyond what we know is not animate. Creatures that roll in dust and mud meet the eye as dust and mud. Hence my rhinoceros surprise. It's why in thick bush ivory hunters often found themselves within spitwad distance of elephants before they saw them. While these beasts seem too big to escape notice, their hide is mottled by shadows, and by the patches of earth our eyes accept as unimportant. Creases in the skin become lattices of branches. Up close there's no visible profile because the creature is too big. It becomes a mural of the insignificant, so vast we must move our eyes to peg its height and breadth.

Stateside, even game of modest size slips our gaze in the same way. Our eyes are slaves to our thinking. They crave details peculiar to the quarry — say, deer. We're programmed to search at a certain height above the ground (usually too high!), and to look for specific forms or colors. New hunters want to see a deer. Veterans make do with a horizontal backline, the dull gleam of antlers, a white tail border, the glint of an eye. But even those clues are gifts. To see more game is to discern the less obvious.

Looking low is a good start. Engaging other people, we're used to looking straight ahead. We put computer and TV screens, mirrors, microwaves, household thermostats, taxidermy and wall art near eye level. So habituated, we gaze over the backs of most North American game animals. A whitetail buck, 42 inches at the shoulder, is a big deer. Bedded, it's ankle-high. A reclining coyote is no taller than a can of beans.

You'll see more deer and predators when you inspect cover as if looking for a lost rabbit.

Also, you'll see more of everything when you're still. When an animal — predator or prey — wants to scrutinize a suspect form, it becomes stone-still. It can't see well when moving. Neither can you. Brush and hillsides sliding by as you walk become blurs, erasing detail. The flick of an ear is canceled by your own motion. Glassing while moving the binocular — panning — has a like effect, magnified by the lenses.

Even when you try to hold it motionless, the bino exaggerates quivers induced by your pulse and twitching muscles and wobbly joints. Steadying the glass with shooting sticks or against a tree, or resting elbows on knees from the sit is a pious idea. One-hand binocular use can give a quick read on an object or movement suddenly obvious, but effective glassing requires two hands, plus any support you can muster.

To keep track of where you've glassed a landscape or a patch of cover, read the field of view with a still binocular as you might the page of a book — left to right, top to bottom, Then shift the field to bracket the adjoining patch of hillside or



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cover. Still-hunting, stop often where you can look back and to the sides, ideally where you have lanes of fire.

Use Logic to Locate

At any given moment, game can be just about anywhere. But you haven't unlimited time to find it. To improve your odds, look where logic and your knowledge of the animal tells you it's most likely to be at that time of day. Then probe less likely places that might appeal to pressured game. On one mid-season hunt, a friend and I prowled a complex of canyons, looking for a big mule deer. The first day we saw several bucks, the next day, fewer. Sightings diminished as the week spun out. The last morning showed us no deer.

While packing up at the cabin, my pal opted to make one last pass solo through gentle headlands. He drove up just before I left, a dandy muley in his truck. "I got lucky," he conceded. "Too much of too little on those flats." In other words, where no cover looks good enough to hold deer, nearly every clump of grass is good enough. We'd already covered the best places. This deer had found peace in a weed-patch hunters hadn't bothered to kick. Scott had been persistent. He'd also targeted possible hideouts repeatedly with his binocular, knowing that as the sun moved, a slight change in its angle could reveal pieces of deer.

Animals eat where the food is good and access is easy. But hunting pressure can put them off those places. Security matters, especially to game old enough to weigh risks against rewards. Foraging at night, animals can tap preferred places safely, but if travel at the edge of day proves hazardous, they might move to adjacent range or just eat on the cheap where hunters don't go. They bed with an eye to concealment, thermal protection, wind coverage, escape routes and traffic. Often woody cover that looks secure to us can be less appealing to game that's been rousted from it or has dodged a missile or two from treestands.

A pal once shot a big buck on close-cropped pasture after hunting for a week in "ideal" cover on slopes above. Bedded in ravines and eating at night, this deer had simply lived where hunters didn't look.

Animals such as coyotes, pronghorns and Western deer are adept at using landform to conceal their movements out of cover, traveling from bed to food source and back, or just foraging in the open. In the bellies of coulees and irrigation canals they can scoot from one plum thicket, hedgerow or corn field to the next undetected. They slip over barren spines



When glassing game, mark it well so you can sneak in with only a few stops, ensuring you're still on track.



Many hunters look far and miss game up close. It's a good practice to glass nearby first.

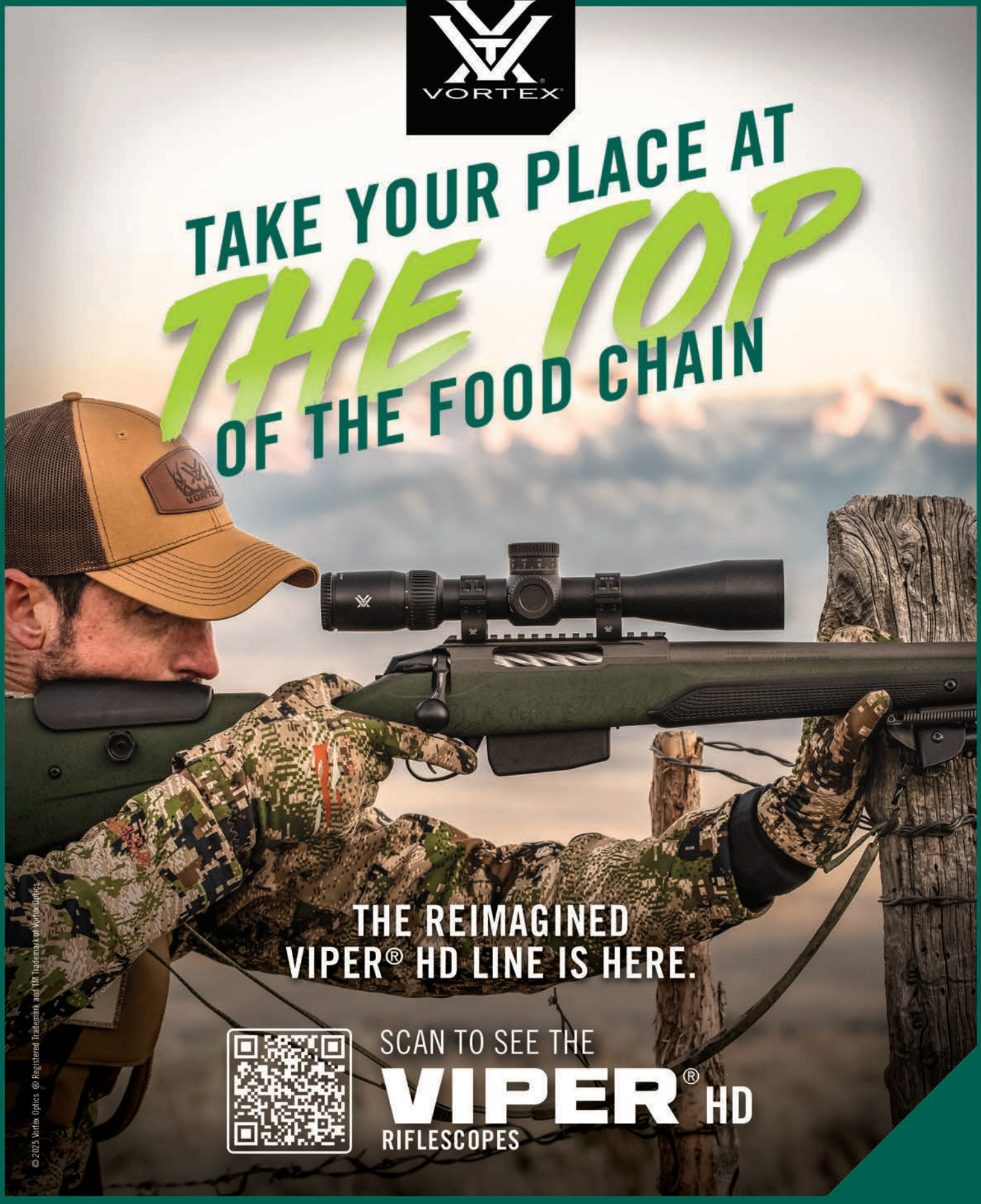
quickly. Knowing they're vulnerable, they often duck their heads to run low or open the throttle to spend less time exposed.

These days, as long-range rifles, loads and optics tempt shooters to fire at game once too far for a shot, animals are wising up. Once, riding through aspens just before sunup, I heard elk moving. My pal and I bailed off our ponies and dashed to the edge of a meadow. The elk didn't tarry, sifting into distant timber as, crosswire on the bull, I waited for my friend to get the shot. He was seconds late. I didn't fire.

Fear of missing opportunity at long range has shifted hunters' focus farther out. Result: They often overlook closer game and forfeit easy shots. There's no point in looking where distance precludes a shot or terrain makes an approach untenable. Close is where you want to see your quarry! If you wanted to see it yonder you'd *be* yonder! An overlooked animal nearby is a chance lost, because there it will detect you, if it hasn't already. Peering into country impractical to reach or too far for a shot makes more sense when scouting than when hunting.

Sneak and Peek

In brushy hills cut by coulees and steep washes where ridge-to-ridge distances are


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Plan glassing with your partner to mesh timing and avoid duplication. Shooting sticks steady binos.

less than, say, 300 yards, I like to still-hunt just below the horizon, and glass to the adjoining slope. So positioned, I can see animals that would hear or scent me and then slip away were I on that slope. Even small folds can be hunted this way. Once, in a woodlot split by a ravine, I eased through logging slash, glassing just 70 yards into the cover opposite. A buck rose from his bed in debris too thick for a quick sprint and hesitated just long enough.

Another time, a friend and I split at the head of a narrow canyon and moved parallel just off the top. I watched a fine buck appear in mountain mahogany short yards ahead of Vern, then slip downhill and stand as, unaware, he passed. I declined the shot, but soon caught my friend's eye and signaled him back through, cross-wind. He eased along the same trail and killed the buck at 30 steps.

If you can't glass a lot of country, examine less country well. Terrain too steep and wooded for easy hunting can concentrate game in the few places where travel is easy and sun pierces the canopy to fuel forage. Once, numb with cold and about to leave a rocky lip that showed me only a couple of slots in timber below, I glassed my surroundings once more. A forked branch I'd dismissed several times became an antler just 80 yards off! With no shot, I tried an approach. Stymied by ice, I backed out of my descent just in time to catch the deer making off.

Persistence can pay on the prairie, too. Calling coyotes from a perch that afforded a great view and a basalt outcrop to scotch my profile, I watched the frost give way to a pale sun. About to leave, I looked once more over my shoulder. A fine pelt was staring from 60 yards. My .243 Win. claimed it.

If you muff a stalk, watch the animal as it leaves. You might get a second chance. In a woodlot I once startled a doe that bounded off with a small group of other whitetails barely visible through the trees. On a hunch, I hurried cross-wind to a gap to watch a skid trail. The group appeared at a walk. The buck fell to my .300 Savage.

Another time, I stupidly topped an open ridge without examining the off-side as it revealed itself a step at a time. A buck sprinted from a hollow, sped across the sage, then slowed to a trot on a hill nearly a mile off. At its crest, he suddenly dropped from view. Bedded! Hidden by land-form, I swung wide on a long approach. On hands and knees, then my belly, I reeled in the yards up that hill. When an antler tip moved a stone's toss ahead, I readied the rifle, struck the earth with my foot and killed the deer as it rose. Years later, I would take a big whitetail the same way, muffing a first attempt, then snaking through grass to spot antler tips.

Peering into dead grass has rewarded other deer hunters. One, having blanked on an all-day trek in Colorado, was nursing sore feet on his way back to trailhead when he spotted dull slivers of white in a brushy swale 30 yards off. A cautious step brought him another angle. "A cow skeleton," he surmised. Then the slats moved! Seconds later, his .30-06 bullet claimed the first Colorado whitetail ever listed in the Boone and Crockett Club's all-time records.

Hunting predators or deer, or just trudging through bush in rhino country, you'll fare best when you look low and close and carefully — and recognize what you're looking at.

GOOD GLASS — SPEND WHAT YOU CAN

For many hunters, the high cost of a binocular by Leica, Zeiss or Swarovski is a wise investment in seasons to come. An animal overlooked because its image wasn't crisp or bright enough might be the only game you see that season, or an exceptional specimen.

A binocular helps you see, partly because it magnifies. It also helps your eye focus and limits its field, so your gaze doesn't as easily wander. The bino's main task is to show detail, near and far. You pay more for the best binoculars largely because the lenses have the resolution to deliver the sharpest images, and all lens surfaces have multiple coatings of rare earths to make images brighter. (An uncoated surface can lose up to 4 percent of incident light to reflection and refraction.)

For almost all hunting, I favor the modest power and size of an 8x32mm binocular. It's an easy glass to carry and to tuck into my jacket during a squall. More importantly, it's easy to use, with a wide, bright field that doesn't dance about uncontrollably when I'm winded. It also offers great depth of field; images appear sharp across a wider range of distance than in high-power glass. The shine of a coyote's eye comes clear yards beyond the stump that caught my attention.

Powerful lenses can't substitute for mediocre glass. Besides, magnification has its own liabilities. Brightness diminishes unless bigger front glass boosts the diameter of the exit pupil — the shaft of light transmitted to your eye. (EP = objective lens diameter/magnification.) Healthy eyes dilate to about 6mm in very dim shooting light but shrink to the size of a finishing nail in bright sun. An EP bigger than your pupil is of no use. I've found an 8x32mm's 4mm EP is big enough for most light conditions.

— Wayne van Zwoll


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GETTING ON TRAC

Knowing animal patterns and densities by reading the signs they leave behind can ensure that you work the most fruitful areas and avoid those that are unproductive.



CK

By Tim E. Hovey

GROWING UP IN A RURAL AREA IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME RUNNING AROUND PUBLIC LAND LEARNING EVERYTHING I COULD ABOUT THE OUTDOORS. Very early on, I became interested in the tracks animals left while moving through the area. Finding game trails at the edge of our rural property, I'd inspect the tracks of the animals that used the pathway. After identifying them, I'd smooth out the trail, erase the tracks and check it again the following morning. I didn't know it then, but this childhood interest in tracks would pay off significantly when I got into hunting.

Always there to nurture my outdoor hobbies, my dad wrapped up a Tom Brown tracking book for me during my 13th Christmas. When I was outside tracking, that book was always with me. The text taught me the subtle differences between front and hind leg tracks, track patterns and distances and one of the most important tracking traits, the difference between old and new animal prints. I referenced the book so often that the pages began to separate from the binding.

During my mid-teens, I became interested in hunting, starting off with pursuing rabbits. Trudging through fresh snow with my H&R single-shot 20-gauge over my shoulder, I'd look for the asymmetrical tracks of a cottontail rabbit. The quarter-size marks in the snow were almost unnoticeable and didn't hold any discernible details. However, the pattern and the fact that they were fresh meant rabbits were in the area. I would not have known what those tracks looked like without that book my dad gave me.

Another tracking book paired animals tracks with the scat they also left behind. From game birds to wild pigs, I began to easily recognize the recent presence or absence of the animals I chased in the areas I hunted. Early on, I began to realize that if I could become familiar with animal tracks, habitat requirements, the time periods they were active and the sounds they made, it would allow me to sharpen my hunting skills.

Long before the internet, I had to rely on the public library for information on animal behavior. Books on hunting were extremely limited, but I lucked out on an audio tape that contained animal sounds. Most were of animals I would never see in my area, but I gleaned the sound deer

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Fresh snow can be great for tracking animals — both predator and prey.

make when alarmed and the distinctive call of a cougar.

The preferred habitat of game animals was almost completely learned from tracking. Understanding that animal tracks were left in the habitat they moved through told me they either passed through the area at one time or were living there. Seeing deer in a distant alfalfa field in the morning and then again near sundown, I discovered that for most of the day, they were bedded somewhere. Kicking through wild edge habitat near the field, I kicked up several bedded deer and soon concluded that most deer bed down close to food.

As I moved further down the hunter's path, I started to focus on other signs that indicated animals were around. In areas where the terrain made it tough to find animal tracks, I identified regular paths through grassy areas where critters traveled. Following these, I would find areas where larger animals bedded down, as well as vegetation that had been fed on. During my first wild pig hunt, I located a wallow, a wet area where pigs roll in the mud. In the damp sediment I found the impression of the coarse hair of the wild boar that had been there only an hour earlier. I thought that was the coolest thing ever.

What's It All Mean?

While it is important to be able to identify animal tracks, it is equally important to understand the signs left by animals just moving through. Scat, bedding areas, wallows and paths left through vegetation, will allow hunters to gain valuable information on direction of travel and the size of their quarry. Tracks identify the animal; the rest gives you clues on where to find them.

A great place to see an abundance of animal tracks is around a watering hole. The damp soil is perfect for preserving the prints of animals coming in to drink. If I'm ever scouting new areas, I like to locate a spring or small pond to see exactly what species of animals move through the location.

When I started pursuing predators, I made sure that the areas I chose to call contained the prey coyotes and bobcats fed on. Before I set up any stand, I would scout the location, looking for rabbit and other small mammal prints. Concentrating on prints and scat, if the area held enough sign, habitat and forage for small game, I knew the predators would be close by.

As important as accurately identifying prints, is being able to age them. Old tracks will indicate activity, but it won't be recent. New tracks will give you a better idea of current game abundance in the area. New tracks will be sharply detailed, and depending on the soil type, can have crisp edges, indicating that they were left very recently. Old tracks will be wind worn and not as detailed. They might even contain debris within the depression, indicating they are older, and that the animal might not even be in the area any longer.

Big-Game Bonanza

When I was in my mid-20s, I ramped up my tracking focus while chasing big game in central California. I was on a scouting trip for deer and hiking solo along an old fire road. My goal was to find game trails and locate where deer were bedding for the upcoming deer season. The old road had a gate across it and could be navigated only by foot. Prepared to spend the entire day scouting, I got an early start.

At around noon, I had a solid lay of the land and decided to head back on the same road. Essentially following my own tracks back, I noticed something disturbing about a mile from the truck. An animal had followed my tracks, at times stepping where I stepped, for quite a distance. The animal had eventually left the road, but following the tracks back, it had stayed on my trail for almost half a mile.

"As important as accurately identifying prints, is being able to age them. Old tracks will indicate activity, but it won't be recent. New tracks will give you a better idea of current game abundance in the area."



Following fresh bear tracks, the author closed the distance on this animal without detection.

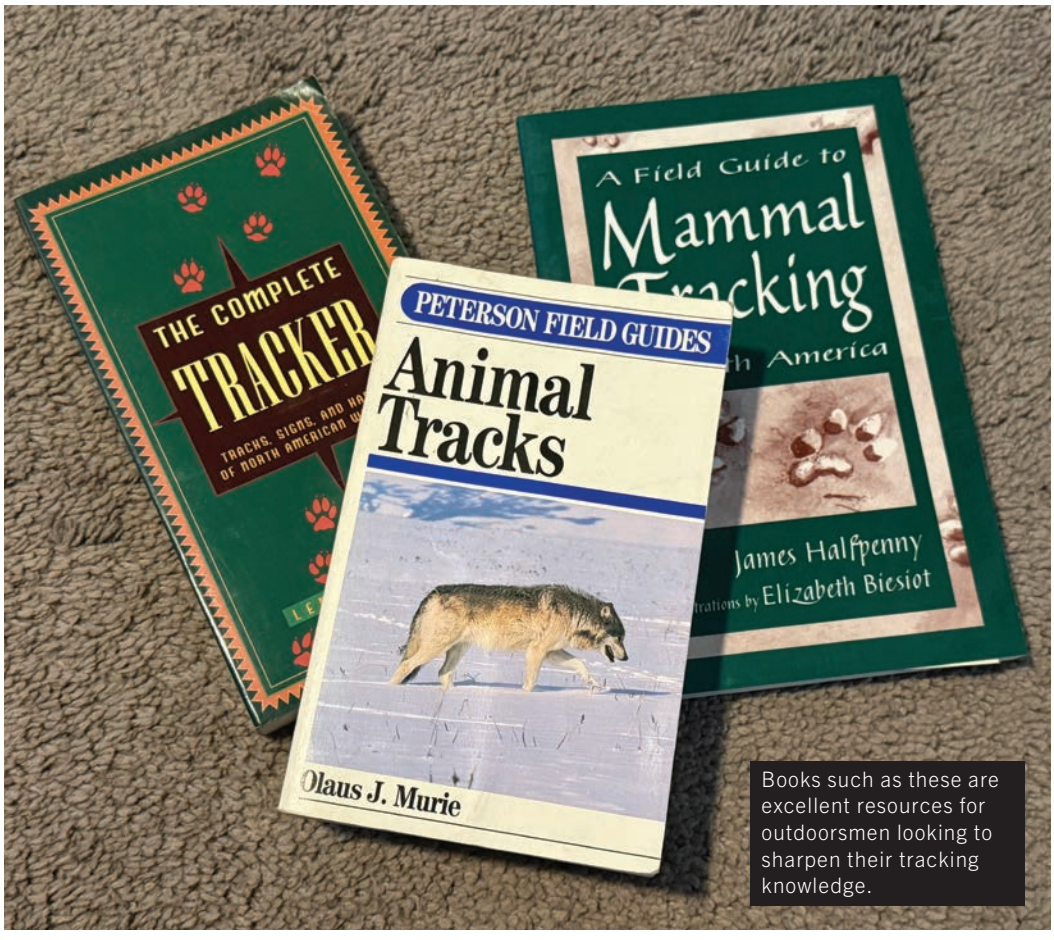
The tracks were of a large cougar, and once I discovered I had been followed, every hair on the back of my neck stood up. With nothing but a binocular and water in my pack, I grabbed a softball-size rock and kept my head on a swivel as I headed back to the truck.

Identifying the tracks of predators early on made me understand that I could track and follow even dangerous animals if I had to. Encountering fresh bear tracks during a work survey, I followed the prints and played the wind for an hour, eventually catching up to a small male bear. He was travelling on a Forest Service road, occasionally dropping into a muddy creek-bottom. My reward at the end of that trail was getting to within 30 feet of the bear without him ever knowing I was there.

From start to finish, understanding tracks and sign led to my big-game success on one particular hunt. In 2016, I was hunting wild pigs on a ranch I had access to. I had spent some time on Google Earth and had located a great looking drainage that looked to have plenty of hiding spots for pigs. When I arrived at the base of the drainage, the wind was moving up the valley and would've notified anything with a nose that I was coming. That wasn't going to work.

Thankfully, I had prepared for this and located a second drainage parallel to the first that I could easily hike, getting me to the top of my target canyon. This drainage was narrow and didn't have a single tree or bush in it. At the very top sat a large oak, but other than that, it was void of vegetation.

Halfway up, I noticed fresh pig tracks moving up the center of the dry canyon. It was a single set of prints, and they looked like those of a large boar. A hundred yards from the top, I found very fresh pig droppings. A few feet beyond that, the tracks left the drainage and angled toward the lone oak. The path through the grass and the direction of the broken stems told me this animal was moving in the direction of the large tree at the top. About 50 yards from the top, I heard grunting and commotion near the lone oak. A huge boar broke from his bed at the base of that tree and started trotting near the ridge.



Books such as these are excellent resources for outdoorsmen looking to sharpen their tracking knowledge.

A single shot from my lever-action .30-30 and the wild pig folded and started rolling down toward me dead.

Encountering the pig tracks in the side canyon, I knew instantly what animal left them. Since it was softer soil and the impressions were sharp, I determined the prints were fresh, likely left earlier that same day. The scat was also fresh and belonged to the same pig. He had dropped it right in the center of his tracks. All this tracking information gave me the size and direction of the animal. The pathway off the creek was easy to see and locating bent and broken grass stems again verified this pig's direction. Since the wind was at my back and blowing up the canyon, he got my scent and decided to leave. All this tracking information enabled me to prepare for an easy shot on the moving pig.

Targeting Fur

Knowing that every animal leaves prints, tracking can be applied to any animal you hunt. When in pursuit of predators, understanding the tracks you see when calling can help you become more successful. Besides knowing what terrain coyotes, foxes and bobcats prefer, finding their tracks and scat near quality habitat is always a good sign when getting ready to call.



The author tracked down this wounded coyote following its escape tracks. It was located 400 yards from where it was hit.



Understanding the tracks and sign left by this large boar gave the author the edge on a wild pig hunt.

Coyote tracks look a lot like dog prints, but are on the small side and more oval from tip to heal. Walking or trotting coyotes usually leave claw impressions with their tracks. The toe pads are closer together than most dog breeds and the top of the larger back pad will possess one rounded point at the front. Fox tracks are about 50 percent smaller than coyote prints, with slightly wider gaps between the pads. In all honesty, they are so similar in structure, that if I'm out in the wild and see smaller coyote prints, I consider them to be fox tracks.

Bobcat prints are rounder than coyote tracks, and the top of the back pad will be bifurcated. They very seldom leave claw marks with the track, unless the soil is exceptionally soft and deep. With fresh tracks in good dusty or damp terrain, the split back pad is easy to observe. However, when that structure is tough to see, I rely heavily on the roundness of the track and the lack of claw marks in the depression to tell me it's a bobcat.

Sharpening your tracking skills can also assist in recovering game after the shot. In the terrain where I hunt coyotes, a wounded predator can easily disappear if I lose sight of it after it's hit. Getting an instant landmark, I make my way to the last spot I saw him, hopefully finding blood. If blood is limited, I'll track the animal, identifying running tracks, bits of hair, kicked up soil and disturbed vegetation. I don't hit them poorly often, but when I need to follow up on an animal, it's good to know I have my tracking tools to lead the way.

I thoroughly enjoy tracking game, and I try to learn a little something new every time I'm out. I now have a solid library of tracking books, and I take a lot of pride in being able to identify what left its mark when I encounter prints. I truly believe that understanding how animals move through their preferred habitat will make you a better hunter. It doesn't matter if I'm out hunting or just hiking, whenever I'm out in the wild, I look for tracks of the animals that walk the same path I travel.

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DEADLIEST PREDATORS EVER

By Wayne van Zwoll

From ambush and in brazen visits to villages, they littered their lairs with human bones.





Tiger country isn't all flat jungle and tall ferns. This terrain could be in America's West. It's in India's Kumaon Division, where Corbett hunted man-eaters.

IT HAD BEEN DRIVEN OUT BY ARMED NEPALESE. ASTONISHINGLY, THEY'D FAILED TO SHOOT THE BEAST. Having killed 200 people, it now imperiled citizens in the Kumaon Division of India's northern United Provinces. The Commissioner of Naini Tal owed the villages there a response. When posting a reward, even sending troops into the jungle failed to bring the animal "to bag" he called upon an unassuming ex-soldier and mid-level government official.

Edward James Corbett was born July 25, 1875, in the Kumaon hills, hard against the Himalayas. Four years old when his father died, "Jim" and his 12 siblings were raised by their mother on the family's Naini Tal estate and at a cottage 15 miles distant. The youngster showed a keen interest in nature, tracking animals and collecting birds' eggs. He learned to hunt "with an old muzzle-loading gun — the right barrel of which was split for 6 inches of its length, and the stock and barrels [lashed by] brass wire."

But this tiger was no ordinary game, the Commissioner pointed out. It ate people. In fact, its tally of human victims had more than doubled in the four years since its arrival. While Corbett had never dealt with such a creature, he accepted the task, promising to investigate the next kill.

It came within a week. A girl had been taken near the village of Pali, west of Champawat. Corbett started the next day, six men bearing his light camp 17 miles. After another day and night, they arrived at Pali the third evening, "Five days after the woman had been killed."

The few dozen people there had stayed indoors. For three nights the tigress had called on the road short yards away. As the huts and courtyard were heavy with filth, Corbett chose to pass the night outside, seated against a tree. He had spent many nights alone in the jungle, but this was the first in striking distance of a man-eater. A full moon cast long shadows under tree limbs. In a light breeze, both moved with feline grace. "I saw a dozen tigers advancing [but] lacked the courage to return to the village and admit [my terror]."

Led the next day to where the girl had died, Corbett learned she'd been in a party collecting oak leaves for cattle. With two other women, she'd climbed a tree near a ravine. The tigress had caught her by the heel on her descent, torn her from the tree, killed her and carried her into a thicket. The other women raced back to their huts. Men with cooking pots beat their way to the site. Growls from a clump of bushes prompted the only man with a muzzle-loader to fire it into the air before all scurried back to the village.

So informed, Corbett asked why he'd not sent the shot into the bushes where surely the beast was feeding. The man replied that if the ball had struck the animal, it would have come out and killed him. Such fatalism marked rural villages. The speed, power and silence of a tiger struck fear into even armed men. Their single-shot blackpowder



Tigers become man-eaters when crippled and unable to kill natural prey, or when coming upon fresh human remains. Unlike leopards, they're not scavengers.

guns were no salvation. A shot was as likely to cause injury that prevented the cat from killing wild prey — a common genesis of man-eaters.

Hunting the Hunter

Corbett's trained eye found tiger spoor where the last victim had been eaten, but the sign was too faint to follow. Scouting, he came upon a hut near the village's hem. The woman could not speak. A year earlier she'd been cutting grass with her sister. A tiger sprang on her sibling and carried her off. In a rage, the woman ran after the cat, screaming and brandishing her sickle. Then the power of speech had left her.

While Corbett told her he'd come to kill that tiger, his words rang hollow. He was inexperienced, as this was the first man-eater known in Kumaon. It had yet to kill twice in one place or return to a kill. It roamed hundreds of square miles. Despairing, he moved a day's walk east, to Champawat. He was joined by two dozen villagers who had dared not walk alone. On the way, Corbett learned of another victim. Two months earlier, a group of men had trod the same road. Suddenly they heard screams, which grew louder. A tiger appeared, carrying a woman by the small of her back. The beast passed the shocked group as she wailed her last pleas to God for help.

"And you men did nothing?" Corbett asked.

"No, sahib. What can men do when they are afraid? Besides, the woman was dying. Angering the tiger would only have brought misfortunes on ourselves."

Corbett walked miles over steep terrain to investigate reports from cowed villagers. Fear sparked rumor. A dead calf proved to be a leopard kill. Then another girl died. He hurried to the spot. Tiger tracks were clearly visible; splashes of blood, then a sari confirmed its prey. By a pool he came upon the girl's leg. He would remember that sight as the most pitiful of his career. It took his eye from the track just as loose earth rolled down a slope 15 feet away. How stupid of me! But instead of killing Corbett, the tiger took its interrupted meal into "a wilderness of rocks … the cracks and chasms masked with ferns and blackberry vines." He followed, all senses alert. By best estimate, the beast ahead had now killed 436 people. It was used to having hunters on its trail. But growls announced the tiger's displeasure at his persistence.

Then it was silent, increasing Corbett's peril and slowing his step. After four hours, to ensure his return in daylight, he left the track. The tiger would finish eating that night and probably not move unless pushed. The going was too rough and noisy there to continue tracking. At Champawat he asked for volunteers to beat the jungle. Few stepped forward. Then the Tahsildar promised to "turn a blind eye" to unlicensed



The grandfather of this lad was killed by the fearsome Talla Des man-eater here, shot by Jim Corbett.



Jim Corbett made a career of the railroad, but hunted India's man-eating cats from 1907 until 1938.

firearms — and that he would provide ammunition. By midday, 298 pushers had shown up.

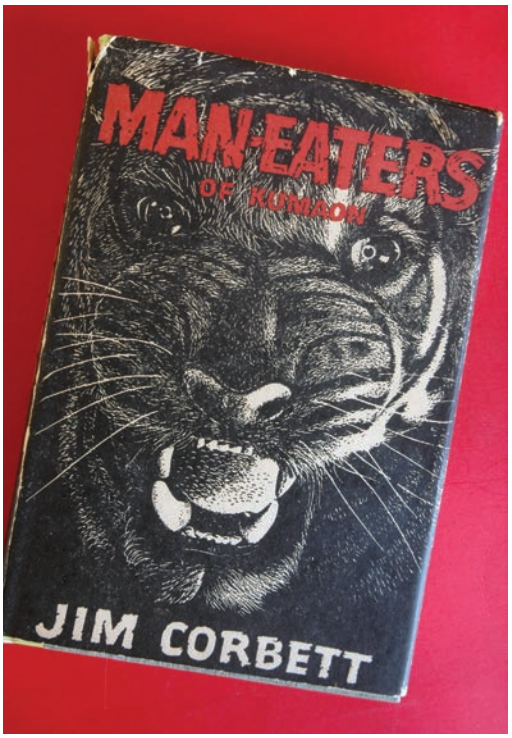
Leaving them to spread across the lower end of the drainage, Corbett hiked in an arc to sit in tall grass at the valley's head. Gun shots, yells and a din from beaten pans and drums brought the tiger out; but when the nervous Tahsildar prematurely fired his shotgun, the cat reversed. Corbett's "despairing bullet" took no effect.

Champawat Man-eater Dies

Meanwhile, the beaters assumed the three reports signaled the tiger was dead. With a triumphant shout they fired all remaining loads. The tiger spun and raced up the gorge, breaking cover near Corbett. At his shot, it angled toward him, presenting an easy target at less than 30 yards. His second .500-grain bullet landed well, but the tiger did not fall. Ears flat, teeth bared, it faced its tormentor.

Corbett, however, had no more cartridges. "I never thought I would get more than two shots," he would admit ruefully. "The third was [simply] for an emergency."

Instead of coming for him, the tiger savaged the bushes round about. Corbett sprinted up the hill, wrenched the Tahsildar's gun from his hands and dashed toward the wounded animal. At 20 feet he threw the smoothbore to cheek — only then noticing a big gap between barrels and breech. Taking that risk over the



The best-known among Jim Corbett's books, "Man-Eaters of Kumaon" was published in 1946.

other, he fired at the cat's open mouth. The ball instead punctured a paw — so shallowly he would later remove it with his fingers. By great good luck, Corbett's rifle bullet took effect at this very moment. The Champawat man-eater died quietly under the last drifting wisps of blackpowder smoke.

On examining the tigress' mouth, Corbett found her right-side canines broken, the upper in half, the lower to the bone. The result of a gun shot, this wound had prevented her from killing natural prey.

For eliminating this tigress, Corbett was given a rifle by London gunmaker John Rigby & Co. Its Mauser action was barreled to .275 Rigby (7x57). Trim and lightweight, it would, over the next decades, account for man-eating tigers at ranges as close as 10 feet.

Officials Slow to Respond

The killing of a human by a wild animal anywhere now brings swift official response — even if the victim is a hunter and the beast is wounded or cornered and acting in self defense. So, kill tallies of India's man-eating cats a century ago leave us aghast. How could a country or its sub-agencies permit dozens of citizens to be stalked and eaten before mounting a lethal campaign against the predator?

Natural hazards in wild places were once accepted without malice. Native peoples suffered more from the great cats of Africa and Asia than did European colonists. The infamous man-eating lion twins of Tsavo claimed 28 rail workers before both cats were killed. But had they not paused construction of the Uganda railway, they might well have eaten more before engineer J.H. Patterson made shooting the pair his personal priority. Notably, the toll these cats exacted in their nightly prowls doesn't include uncounted natives they took from nearby villages.

Implicit here: Some people were more highly valued than others. A European's death mattered; that of a native or a low-caste member was often shrugged off by officials. Corbett was unable to find government records of man-eating tigers pre-dating 1905 in his part of India. This lack of data may well have reflected the scant historical effort to dispatch them. In 1907, when he hunted the Champawat man-eater, Corbett was urged by villagers in the nearby Amora District to save them from the Panar man-eater, a leopard as elusive as it was deadly. Between them, wrote Corbett, these two cats had killed 836 humans! But the government "had no machinery to put in action against them."

On the Trail of Three Man-Eaters

Distances, roads and manpower limited the efforts of the most sympathetic governments. Corbett noted that the Chowgarh tigers roamed "an area of 1,500 square miles of mountains and vales, where the snow lies deep in winter and the valleys are scorching in summer, [where] paths beaten hard by bare feet connect the villages." Reaching the site of a kill could take days of walking. The spoor would be faint or gone. Also, few government agents had the skills, courage or dedication to commit months to the trail of a man-eater. Private contractors and trophy hunters proved ineffective. At one district conference, Corbett was charged with killing three man-eating tigers in the Kumaon Division, and directed to prioritize them: 1st — Chowgarh, Naini Tal District; 2nd — Mohan, Almora District; 3rd — Kana, Garhwal District.

Corbett pushed himself physically and accepted great risk. To keep himself off the tigers' menu, he usually closed solo, the better to focus while remaining aware



Corbett became aware of the Panar man-eater in 1907. The leopard reportedly killed 400 people before he shot it over bait in near darkness.

of jungle sounds and silences. Survival often hinged on senses and options. He tried to choose a time and place. But when in 1938 a young girl was killed at Kot Kindri, the exceedingly long hike delayed his arrival. In that time, the tigress took a woman. Soon thereafter, another victim turned up near Thak. Remaining sign was again faint: a few tipped leaves. But "a goldenrod that had been pressed down had sprung erect." He'd just missed her! Lest the month of hard days on spoor and cold nights over bait cost him his edge, Corbett walked 20 miles home to rest. As if on cue, the cat struck again. Corbett returned. His break came weeks later, when in a rocky thicket she gave voice, a mating call. From a narrow ledge, his .450-400 on a rock above, Corbett mouthed a reply.

Unexpectedly, she "came straight towards [me], working herself up into a perfect fury." Suddenly, she was so near "I could hear the intake of her breath, [thus] as she again filled her lungs, I did the same with mine, and we called simultaneously. [Then] the blast of her deep-throated call struck me in the face." Her huge head appeared in the failing light at mere feet, fortunately near the rifle's muzzle. His first bullet entered under her right eye. The falling tigress "knocked me off the ledge ... recoil from the left barrel, fired while I was in the air, [hammered] my jaw and sent me heels over head."



L-R: The .450-400 and .275 Rigby (7x57), were both used by Corbett. The .303 British and .30-06 also had loyal followings by sportsmen of that day.

The Thak man-eater was dead.

Corbett's nerve had been tested earlier. By April, 1930, the Chowgarh tigress had killed at least 64 people. A year earlier, Corbett had come upon her and her grown cub. Tragically, he'd mistaken the young animal for its mother, sealing the fate of her future victims. Now, on her track again, in jungle that held vision to mere feet, he spied a pair of rare bird's eggs. He picked them up. Short steps on, the trail kinked, forcing a turn. Suddenly he was staring "straight into the tigress' face," just a spring away. The eggs in his left palm, he wrote later, checked a reflexive urge to cheek the rifle, movement that might well have brought the cat on. Instead, with his right hand Corbett eased the Rigby across his chest. He felt that glacial swing "would never be completed ...." His arm was aching, his grip failing when the rifle came to bear. His .275-grain bullet smashed the man-eater's spine and pulped her heart.

A PREDATOR HUNTER'S LIFE

But by all accounts, Corbett was a cool marksman, unhampered by terror or ego.

Before committing 32 years to the almost regular pursuit of man-eaters, Jim Corbett supported his family on the railroad, a career later to span 20 years. During WWI, he served as captain of a 500-man Labor Corps in France. Promoted to Major after armistice, he commanded a Labor Battalion in the Third Afghan War. From 1920 to 1936, he supervised coffee and maize production, seasonally, in East Africa, where he turned from hunting to filming wildlife. Still, he continued to pursue man-eating cats, killing 19 tigers and 14 leopards, his last in 1938. He traveled with a small crew and a Spartan kit. His .275 Rigby rifle "was light to carry, accurate and sighted up to 300 yards." He defended the cartridge's modest punch, also his habit of carrying just five rounds, citing his confidence in the rifle. Corbett didn't proclaim himself a crack shot.

Fifty years after shooting his first man-eater, Corbett affirmed his affection for the beasts. "When I see the expression ... 'blood-thirsty as a tiger,' I think of a small boy ... wandering through the jungles ... when there were 10 tigers to every one that now survives, sleeping anywhere he happened to be when night came on, with a small fire to give him company, [wakened by] the callings of tigers [but knowing] a tiger, unless molested, would do him no harm. I think of him [peering over a] bush and a tiger walking out on the far side ... with an expression on its face that said as clearly as any words, 'Hello, kid, what the hell are you doing here?' [Again] I think of the tens of thousands of men, women and children who, while working in the forests ... pass day after day close to tigers [unaware]."

Corbett wrote several books. His best-known "Man-Eaters of Kumaon" was published in 1946. A life-long bachelor, Jim Corbett died in Kenya, April 19, 1955.

— Wayne van Zwoll

WHAT MAKES A MAN-EATER?

Feline predators are most likely to stalk humans when rendered unable to kill wild prey, or when they come upon fresh human remains.

The great cats have earned their reputation as "dangerous game." Wounded or cornered, they're lethal. Indeed, the leopard, smallest of Africa's "big five," is considered by some PHs the deadliest among them. The late PH Don Heath told me that 80 percent of hunter injuries caused by wildlife in Zimbabwe are the handiwork of leopards, nearly all after the animals were shot, then followed into tight places. But an injured beast is not a man-eater — one that kills people to eat them. The Tsavo lions that pulled railroad workers from camps during East African nights were man-eaters, as was India's lesser-known man-eating leopard of Rudraprayag, which killed 125 people while eluding hunters for eight years.

Corbett pointed out that tigers and leopards are most likely to stalk humans when rendered unable to kill wild prey, or when they come upon fresh human remains. Unlike tigers, he wrote, leopards also scavenge. Some have become man-eaters after finding bodies awaiting funeral rites. Hindus in Corbett's time and homeland were often days bringing their dead to rivers for ritual cremation. Disease outbreaks, notably cholera, and the occasional blooms of war dead, drew leopards, too. While tigers and leopards are both semi-nocturnal and share hunting habits and killing techniques, man-eating tigers lose their fear of humans and move about during the day. Leopards remain shy, killing only when they have the clear edge, after dark. For these reasons, Corbett maintained, "man-eating tigers are easier to shoot than man-eating leopards."

He noted that while tiger cubs mimic the mother, eating what she eats and assisting with kills, he knew of *no* young tiger that upon leaving the care of a man-eating tigress became a man-eater.

— Wayne van Zwoll

GEAR ROUNDUP

By Gordy Krahn

PREDATOR RIFLES

While it's true that rifles chambered in calibers ranging from Mighty Mouse rimfires to Menacing Magnums will put an end to a predator's prowling ways, a certain amount of refinement is necessary if the end goal is a prized pelt and a trip to the local furbuyer. Even if the intention is predator population management, no one rifle/caliber/ammo combo will do it all. Gun Guru Ron Spomer says to find the perfect predator rifle for the job at hand, it's important to first define why you're targeting predators such as coyotes — to control numbers or harvest fur? "If it's the former, you have a wider selection," he said. "If it's the latter, you must compromise somewhat to minimize fur damage. That compromise begins with caliber but continues into muzzle velocity, bullet weight and bullet construction." The good news for fur hunters is that there is no shortage of predator-specific rifles on the market in a mind-boggling assortment of makes, models and configurations for every conceivable predator-hunting application. If you're a casual hunter, you'll likely get by with one or two guns for all your wet work. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool varminteer, you probably already own a battery or rifles and have several more on your wish list. If you're somewhere in-between, as most hunters are, you must face the realization that no one rifle is going to accommodate all types of hunting, in all types or terrain, on all types of critters. The availability of rifles to fill every conceivable predator hunting niche, along with specialized factory ammunition and accessories, are testament to a sustained interest in specialized fur guns. Here's a shopping list to get you started.



AERO PRECISION SOLUS COMPETITION RIFLE

Chambered in 6.5 Creedmore, the Solus Competition Rifle from Aero Precision is built for shooters who require high level precision right out of the box. The heart of the rifle is the Solus short action and its honed and lapped match-grade 22-inch Sendero profile barrel. These features are dropped into the extremely modular Solus chassis to offer a turn-key solution for any precision application. Compatible with AICS and AIAIW magazines, this rifle's key features include a TriggerTech single-stage trigger, adjustable magazine catch and thumb rest, compatibility with tangless AR-15 pistol grips, Arca and M-Lok compatible forend with M-Lok slots at the 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions, fully adjustable stock and adjustable cant recoil pad.

MSRP: $2,210

www.aeroprecisionusa.com

BENELLI LUPO CHARRED TIMBER BOLT ACTION

Benelli's new Lupo Charred Timber Bolt-Action Rifle provides the ultimate in all-weather durability, with a subdued Labrador Gray Benelli Surface Treatment (BE.S.T.) on the barreled action, a proprietary, impenetrable DLC coating that protects treated surfaces and embellished subtle, multi-color webbing design on the stock. As for functional upgrades, the Lupo Charred Timber adds a one-piece Picatinny rail to give the hunter diverse scope mounting options plus a multi-port muzzle brake to tame recoil and to provide faster target reacquisition. All rifles come standard with Benelli's proven-tough three-lug, one-piece bolt with a short 60-degree throw, adjustable trigger, Progressive Comfort recoil management, LOP adjustability, detachable double-stack box magazine and integrated swivel mounts.

MSRP: $2,299

www.benelliusa.com

BERGARA B-14 CIMA CARBON FIBER RIFLE

Bergara Rifles introduces its lightest B-14 model rifle yet, the B-14 Cima CF (Carbon Fiber), built for hunters who appreciate the balance and feel of a classic, sporter-style rifle, but also demand modern innovation and reduced weight. The foundation of the Cima CF is its RTM sporter stock, crafted using a Resin Transfer Molding (RTM) process. This advanced method results in a 100 percent carbon fiber stock that's not only rigid, but also incredibly light — just 18 ounces. Inside, an SMC carbon mini-chassis is precision-fit to provide the action with a solid bedding platform. Paired with the Bergara CURE carbon barrel, the Cima CF is engineered for maximum weight reduction without sacrificing performance.

MSRP: $1,849.99

www.bergarausa.com

BROWNING X-BOLT 2 SPEED SPR BOLT ACTION

The new X-Bolt 2 Speed SPR Bolt-Action Rifle from Browning is built for on-the-move hunters with a no-holds-barred design with features such as a fluted sporter contour barrel that keeps the rifle light, maneuverable and easy to carry — optimized for use with an optional suppressor. A radial muzzle brake and thread protector cap are included, and an optional Browning Recoil Hawg Sporter muzzle brake for extra recoil reduction can be added. The action is bedded and the barrel is free floated for consistent accuracy. The DLX trigger comes preset from the factory at 3.5 pounds, and the rifle's lightweight Vari-Tech composite stock features three-way adjustment. Browning OVIX camo provides excellent concealment.

MSRP: $1,569.99-$1,639.99

www.browning.com









CARACAL USA CSR308 BOLD-ACTION RIFLE

Chambered in .308 Win., the Caracal CSR308 Bolt-action Precision Rifle features a proprietary bolt design with three locking lugs, a 60-degree rotation, dual ejectors and a tool-steel extractor housed in a tool-less bolt body for simplified maintenance. It accepts any SR-25/AR-10 magazine, and the controls are ergonomically located in the common AR-15 locations for ease of operation. The CSR308 is equipped with 5⁄8-24 RH barrel threads, and its folding buttstock and lightweight chassis system allow for endless adjustability and comfort. Other key features include a 7075 T-6 aluminum lightweight chassis, precision-machined 4340 steel receiver with a 1913 Picatinny rail, integrated 32CrMoV feeding ring, fully adjustable two-stage trigger system, ambidextrous magazine release and safety selector and vertically oriented bolt stop.

MSRP: NA

www.caracalusa.com

CHRISTENSEN ARMS RANGER .22 RIFLE

The Ranger Rifle from Christensen Arms is the go-to choice for rimfire shooters who value a lightweight and compact design. Ideal as a truck gun or for venturing off the beaten trail, this rifle is perfect for everything from a first training rifle to a long-time favorite hunting/range companion for seasoned hunters. With guaranteed sub-MOA accuracy at 50 yards, the Ranger is equipped with Christensen Arms' precision receiver and TriggerTech (Rem. 700 compatible) trigger. It also has a proprietary one-piece 0-MOA Picatinny rail and Ruger magazine. Other features include dual extractors, threaded bolt handle and a Christensen Arms carbon fiber composite stock. The Ranger is available in .17 HMR, .22 LR and .22 WMR chamberings.

MSRP: Starting at $849.99

www.christensenarms.com

COOPER RIFLES OF ARKANSAS MT HERITAGE

Cooper Rifles of Arkansas has announced the introduction of its limited-edition Montana Heritage Short-Action Bolt-Action Rifle. This extremely limited production run of just 350 rifles commemorates Nighthawk Custom's acquisition of Cooper Firearms of Montana by coupling some of Cooper's classic features with Nighthawk's American manufacturing know-how and handcrafted attention to detail. On the side of every Montana-made action are the Cooper Rifles of Arkansas and Nighthawk Custom logos. The laminate stock version is chambered in .308 Win. and is equipped with a graphite black Cerakote steel match-grade barrel, TriggerTech trigger and five-round magazine. The Montana Heritage is also available in a walnut stock version (with or without a carbon fiber barrel), chambered in .308 Win. or 6.5 Creedmoor.

MSRP: $3,499-$4,999

www.cooperfirearms.com

CZ-USA 600+ TRAIL BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

Compact and versatile, the CZ 600+ Trail Bolt-Action Rifle from CZ-USA features a retractable stock and is compatible with AR and CZ BREN 2 magazines. The CZ 600+ series features a groundbreaking modular design highlighted by a host of innovations. These include an advanced Silent, Ergonomic and Ambidextrous (S.E.A.) safety, a quick four-position adjustable trigger and an innovative interchangeable barrel system. The series guarantees unmatched precision accuracy, supported by CZ's lifetime barrel warranty, ensuring consistent, reliable performance in the field and at the range. Other key features include a controlled feeding system, cold hammer-forged barrel, a lightweight aluminum alloy receiver and an integrated Weaver rail or steel receiver with Remington 700-style mounting interfaces.

MSRP: From $1,299

www.czfirearms.com

GEAR ROUNDUP

PREDATOR RIFLES



DANIEL DEFENSE DDMA HUNTER 5.56MM

Accurate, tough and hard-hitting, the Daniel Defense AR-15 Style Hunter Rifle ($2,299) takes the best aspects of the gunmaker's proven designs and tailor fits them to the modern sportsman. Built around an 18-inch cold hammer forged barrel, the Hunter 5.56mm offers precision and accuracy with a wide variety of projectiles. Shielding the barrel and mid-length gas system is the MFR 15.0 free-floating handguard, and with a continuous Picatinny rail on top and M-Lok attachment on the sides and bottom, there is plenty of room for hunting accessories. The Hunter 5.56mm comes with a Geissele Super semi-automatic, two-stage trigger and an ambidextrous safety selector. It is finished in a vivid hydro-dipped Kryptek Highlander camo pattern.

MSRP: $2,299

www.danieldefense.com



FRANCHI MOMENTUM ALL-TERRAIN ELITE RIFLE

Franchi's Momentum All-Terrain Elite Bolt-Action Rifle is now available in Franchi Verdant camo, one of three new patterns created by Franchi designers to offer maximum concealment. As a go anywhere, do anything model, the Momentum All-Terrain Elite was a natural choice for the equally capable Verdant pattern. With its combination of micro and macro elements to provide visual depth and profile breakup along with a color scheme of bright greens, earthy browns and dark shadow hues on a subdued tan canvas, it adapts to multiple environments and terrain. Franchi Verdant is available on both Momentum All-Terrain Elite .308 Win. and .223 Rem. models. This pattern is complemented by the rifles' Midnight Bronze Cerakote barreled action, muzzle brake and bolt handle.

MSRP: $1,449

www.franchiusa.com



HENRY LEVER-ACTION SUPREME RIFLE

At the heart of the Henry Lever-Action Supreme Rifle, lies a quad bar linkage and slider crank mechanism that propels the already famously smooth Henry action to new heights. This action drives the bolt with a multi-lug rotating face for positive lockup, extraction and ejection. The Supreme sports a threaded free-floated blued steel barrel fully capable of delivering sub-MOA groups — 18 inches in the .223/5.56mm variant and 16.5 inches in the .300 BLK version. Other features include a match-grade 4-pound trigger, fully adjustable trapezoidal rear sight and steel front blade, American walnut stock cut with ultra-precise diamond checkering, ambidextrous tang safety switch and magazine release and a 10-round Magpul PMAG with a five-round limiter.

MSRP: $1,299

www.henryusa.com



HORIZON FIREARMS VENATIC .22 CREEDMOOR

The ultra-lightweight Venatic Carbon Rifle from Horizon Firearms — now chambered in .22 Creedmoor — is a great fit for the extreme backcountry predator hunter. The stock is an iota EKO in a different internal configuration than the standard EKO — specifically inletted and built just for this rifle. Featuring thumb detents, a long grip and the industry's most popular Arca-Swiss rail, the Venatic Carbon also includes other premium components, hand-picked by Horizon's designers and long-range hunting enthusiasts, that elevate the Venatic's performance. These include the innovative Stiller Wombat action, a Benchmark 416R stainless-steel barrel, and the highly regarded TriggerTech trigger. Available in a variety of the industry's most sought-after calibers, the Venatic is a rifle built for high performance in the field.

MSRP: $3,799

www.horizonfirearms.com



HOWA .22 ARC YOTE MINI-ACTION RIFLE

The ever-popular Howa Mini-Action Rifle is now available in .22 ARC, the perfect caliber for varmint hunting, match shooting and hunting predators at night. The .22 ARC outperforms other .22-caliber cartridges in its class, rivaling .22-250 Rem. performance in a mini action, designed to take advantage of today's long ogive, high-BC bullets with a variety of ammo offerings available from Hornady, including its 62-grain ELD-VT V-Match, 75-grain ELD Match Black and 88-grain ELD Match. The Howa Mini .22 ARC is available with 22-inch Standard, 20-inch Steel Light Varmint and 20-inch Carbon Fiber barrel options. Other features include tool-less firing pin removal, matched receiver and forged bolt, five-round detachable magazine, reliable M-16 style extractor/ejector and much more.

MSRP: Starting at $529

www.legacysports.com



HYDRA WEAPONRY HYDRA-10 AR-10

For predator hunters who demand versatility and power, the Hydra-10 from Hydra Weaponry delivers. Available in .308 Win., 6.5 Creedmoor and 8.6 Blackout, this modular AR-10 platform rifle offers a hard-hitting setup capable of dropping coyotes, hogs, or even larger game. Built on a DPMS-pattern receiver and running SR-25 mags, the Hydra-10 features Hydra's signature Quick-Change Barrel Upper Receiver (QCB-D), allowing users to swap calibers with minimal parts changes — just a barrel and bolt. Outfitted with a BLK B5 Systems stock and pistol grip, and available in 16- or 18-inch barrel lengths, this rifle adapts to any hunting scenario.

MSRP: $2,299-$2,350

www.hydraweaponry.com



IWI US ZION-25 6.5 CREEDMOOR DMR

The Zion-25 DMR large frame gas gun variant from IWI US is a precision rifle featuring a 17-inch free-floating handguard with M-Lok and Arca rail for accuracy and accessory compatibility and a B5 Systems stock and grip. It comes with one 20-round Magpul PMAG. Its 22-inch barrel combined with the +2 Gas System length allows the user to take full advantage of the 6.5 Creedmoor's impressive ballistics, velocity and accuracy potential while smoothly handling the recoil to keep the user on target. It is equipped with a custom Timney two-stage trigger and has a 20-round magazine capacity. The design makes for faster and more accurate follow-up shots and smooth transitions to new targets.

MSRP: $1,949.99

www.iwi.us/firearms



KELTEC SUB2000 GEN 3 FOLDING CARBINE

KelTec's new iteration of its popular 9mm Sub2000 folding carbine, aptly named the Sub2000 Gen 3, features the single twist-and-fold motion of its rotating forend. Not only does the Gen 3 easily fold in half with a single motion for storage, but this simple, single-handed maneuver also maintains seamless and quick deployment. Other updates include an aluminum trigger and redesigned trigger mechanics for a lightened, clean 5-pound trigger pull. It also provides more precise feedback, translating into increased accuracy and quick follow-up shots. Weighing just 4.2 pounds when unloaded, with an overall length of 30.45 inches and 16.15 inches folded, the Sub2000 Gen 3 facilitates quick deployment and increased accuracy at a value price point.

MSRP: $511

www.keltecweapons.com

GEAR ROUNDUP

PREDATOR RIFLES



PURE PRECISION SUPPRESSED SKLTN

Built on the SKLTN action and CRB Custom Rifle Barrels blank, the Integrally Suppressed SKLTN from Pure Precision maintains the same level of accuracy shooters have come to expect from the gun maker but are even quieter than a regular suppressed rifle. From .22 Creedmoor to .300 PRC, the results speak for themselves. With enhanced sound suppression and mitigated recoil, these rifles are a dream to shoot — especially for smaller or younger shooters. They are a game changer for new shooters as well, both young and old — whether it's chasing big bulls in the high country, taking care of some nocturnal predators or out at the range with family and friends.

MSRP: Starts at $7,500

www.pureprecision.com



ROCK ISLAND ARMORY TM22 FEATHER RIFLE

The Rock Island Armory .22-caliber LR TM22 Feather, a new age lightweight rifle sporting polymer furniture, is built to the newest standards while retaining classical attributes. It features an adjustable stock, rear handle with front sight post and target barrel performance, and is compatible with AR-type grips, commercial buffer tube adapters and top rails. This rifle is appropriate for all ages and all types of shooting scenarios. It is equipped with an 18-inch barrel and has an overall length of 36.5 inches. The TM22 Feather weighs 4.9 pounds and comes with two 10-round polymer magazines. Aftermarket 15-round and 25-round magazines are available. It has a front bead sight and rear handle sight and comes with a black anodized finish.

MSRP: $199

www.armscor.com



RUGER AMERICAN RIFLE GENERATION II PREDATOR

The Ruger American Rifle Generation II Predator .22 ARC is an update of the original American-made rifle. Significant improvements include a three-position tang safety and a more rigid and ergonomic stock. Incorporated into the Ruger Marksman adjustable trigger, the three-position safety maintains an intuitive "push forward to fire" operation while delivering a crisp, clean break. The Generation II Predator sports a Green Splatter stock and Burnt Brown Cerakote finished 22-inch barrel. CNC-machined from stainless steel, the full diameter three-lug bolt reliably feeds from a variety of magazines and offers a short, 70-degree bolt throw, which provides ample scope clearance. The bolt handle is threaded and fitted with an anodized round knob.

MSRP: $729

www.ruger.com



SHAW BARRELS EXCURSION RIFLE

Available in right- and left-hand models, Shaw Barrel's Excursion Rifle features premium components from Peak44, Hawkins Precision and TriggerTech. Rifle weight depends on the chosen configuration, but most bare rifle weights (empty rifle with magazine and scope base) fall between 6 and 7 pounds. Outstanding features include a 416 stainless-steel receiver, perfectly true receiver bore and face, ultra-smooth bolt operation, TriggerTech trigger, Peak44 Blacktooth stock, Hawkins M5 bottom metal and two-position safety. Sub-MOA accuracy is guaranteed. Other key features include a 416 stainless-steel receiver, ultra-smooth bolt operation, TriggerTech trigger and two-position safety. The Excursion comes with one AICS-pattern magazine along with many other options to choose from. New for 2025, it is available with a titanium-sleeved tension barrel.

MSRP: $2,940/Titanium barrel

www.shawcustombarrels.com



SIG SAUER CROSS TRAX BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

Designed for those hunters looking to travel light and go far, the Cross Trax from Sig Sauer is a minimalist bolt-action rifle that isn't short on features. At the base of the rifle is the Sig Cross receiver paired with a lightweight, folding stock and skeletonized 11.5-inch handguard. Now chambered in .243 Win., the Cross Trax is equipped with a standard 16-inch stainless-steel barrel and can be folded into a compact length of only 26 inches. Additional features that hunters will find useful in the field include a low-profile, no-snag bolt knob and handle plus a two-stage adjustable match trigger. Weighing only 5.9 pounds, the Cross Trax is nicely balanced and can easily be stowed or carried.

MSRP: $1,519.99

www.sigsauer.com



SAVAGE 110 CARBON PREDATOR RIFLE

Turning the tables on wily predators requires tools that can withstand the elements and perform in all conditions. The 110 Carbon Predator from Savage Arms is packed with features that make a difference when every shot counts. Its user-adjustable AccuTrigger can be adjusted down to 1.5 pounds while the granite textured stock features AccuFit with AccuStock, which secures the action three-dimensionally along its entire length. Outstanding features include a matte black carbon steel receiver, two sling swivel studs, two-piece Weaver-style bases and Proof Research carbon fiber wrapped stainless-steel cut rifled barrel, threaded muzzle and AICS detachable box magazine. The Savage 110 Carbon Predator is available in six popular hunting chamberings in three barrel lengths — 16, 18 and 22 inches.

MSRP: $1,689

www.savagearms.com



TAG FIREARMS MINI FIX 6MM ARC RIFLE

The Mini Fix in 6mm ARC from Tag Firearms is small, savage and dead-on surgical. It's the scaled-down version of the OG Fix, built for hunters and shooters who want to run hard in the field without lugging a boat anchor. It's fed by AR mags and optimized for short-action calibers such as 6mm ARC, 5.56mm NATO and .300 BLK. It delivers sub-MOA accuracy and has a 45° throw bolt, folding stock and monolithic receiver. All at just 5 pounds, 10 ounces. The one-piece monolithic receiver and full-length top rail make the Mini Fix one of the strongest, most rigid platforms out there — perfect for mounting thermals, optics, lasers and whatever else the hunt demands.

MSRP: $3,150-$3,699

www.tagfirearms.com



WILSON COMBAT TACTICAL HUNTER

The Tactical Hunter from Wilson Combat, chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, is the ideal large-bore AR for hunting or general tactical and defensive use. The 18-inch fluted threaded, match-grade button-rifled barrel is tuned for suppressed or non-suppressed shooting, and an adjustable buttstock allows users to adapt the rifle's size for a custom fit. The Wilson Combat M-Lok rail is lightweight but rugged and designed for heavy use. Weighing 7 pounds, 10.7 ounces, the Tactical Hunter is equipped with a lightweight billet upper (flat top) and lower receiver and rifle-length gas system with adjustable gas block. Among its many features is a Wilson Combat/BCM Starburst Gunfighter grip, Wilson/Rogers Super Stoc and Wilson Combat Tactical Trigger Unit.

MSRP: $3,436/Base price

www.wilsoncombat.com

GEAR ROUNDUP

AIRGUNS

The popularity of airguns is undeniable — growing exponentially in recent years, sparked by technological advancements that have turned backyard plinkers into legitimate, precision hunting rifles. Their modern day roots, perhaps, lie under the Christmas tree, where wide-eyed youngsters unwrapped the Daisy Red Ryder or Crosman American Classic that would fuel an obsession that would wane very little over the years. These young riflemen — and rifle-ladies in some cases — grew up to become sportsmen and women as they graduated from airguns to small-caliber rifles for varmint and small-game hunting, and ultimately to larger-caliber rifles for big-game and predator pursuits. And this has fueled a growing industry, with a new generation of manufacturers producing more powerful high-tech guns to meet the growing demand alongside enhancements to existing gun models. *Predator Xtreme* Contributor Jim Chapman says it has been a steady evolution to the big-bore rifles used for hunting these days. "For many years, there was a common design thread amongst these guns, all PCP power plants, calibers in the .30- to .50-caliber range, and mostly big, heavy, single-shot rifles. These guns were all bolt actions at first, often with two bolts, with one used to access the loading port and one to cock the gun. Triggers tended to be heavy, and guns often lacked an external safety mechanism, so they needed to be de-cocked when on the move. The ergonomics and controls were also improving, side lever cocking replaced bolt actions in many designs, safety mechanisms became ubiquitous, and trigger quality improved substantially, but the designs were similar to their predecessors." Whether you're in the market for a traditional paper-puncher or a full-blown air-powered hunting rifle, these high-test models should trip your trigger.



AIRFORCE AIRGUNS TEXREX AIR RIFLE

The all-new Tex-Rex Air Rifle from Airforce Airguns was engineered for serious hunters and precision shooters. Delivering over 1,000 foot-pounds of energy, this full-size .457-caliber rifle launches heavy slugs with bone-crushing authority — ideal for taking down large game at extended ranges. It features a 34-inch precision barrel for maximum velocity and accuracy, along with CNC-machined components made proudly in Fort Worth, Texas. The Tex-Rex forearm has been upgraded with a rugged, extended design featuring nine precision-cut M-Lok slots — giving hunters and shooters enhanced flexibility for mounting bipods, slings, lights and other essential accessories. Securely fastened to the rifle's frame, it not only improves accessory compatibility but also adds extra grip and control in the field.

MSRP: $1,469.95

www.airforceairguns.com

AIR VENTURI MICROSTRIKE AIR PISTOL

The Air Venturi MicroStrike is a versatile pre-charged pneumatic air pistol that delivers exceptional performance across three chambering options — .177-, .22- and .25-caliber. For fans of compact, feature-packed PCPs, the MicroStrike is the perfect solution. An externally adjustable regulator and hammer spring allow for easy user tuning, and the included AR-style, six-position folding stock gives shooters the ability to quickly transform this pistol into a carbine. Users can install the optic of their choice on the full-length Picatinny rail, or run with the included open sights, and add a muzzle brake or moderator with the 1/2×20 threaded muzzle. The airgun's smooth side-lever action makes it a joy to shoot, and the full metal construction offers a premium and rugged feel.

MSRP: $399

www.airventuri.com

BROCOCK BRK GHOST SPECIAL EDITION

Crafted with a revolutionary monocoque alloy chassis, the BRK Ghost Special Edition Air Rifle blends match-grade precision with all-purpose versatility. Loaded with premium upgrades, this Special Edition airgun is equipped with top and bottom Race ARCA and M-Lok rails, a matching BRK silencer, Race Twin-Clamp optic rail, precision performance cocking lever and the innovative Gecko recoil pad for ultimate control. The Ghost SE's modular platform and user-tuneable Huma-Air regulator lets users customize their setup like never before. Available in .177-, .22-, .25- and .30-caliber, every Ghost Special Edition comes packed in a custom-fitted hard case, loaded with a serious suite of extras that deliver incredible value. This is performance, style and exclusivity — all in one package.

MSRP: $3,499.99

www.brocock.co.uk

CROSMAN CORPORATION 3622 PCP BOLT ACTION

Crosman Corporation's .22-caliber 3622 PCP Rifle is a bolt-action, single-shot, pre-charged pneumatic airgun designed to provide exceptional performance and accuracy for novice shooters and enthusiasts who enjoy target shooting and plinking. With an easily fillable 2,000 psi reservoir, shooters can get up to 25 shots per fill and spend less time worrying about filling and more time enjoying their shooting experience. The rifle was engineered with a durable all-weather synthetic stock, ensuring it can withstand environmental conditions while maintaining its reliability. The 3622 PCP rifle provides an ideal platform for honing shooting skills and developing marksmanship abilities. The rifle is also available in a .177-caliber version, the 3677.

MSRP: $149.90

www.crosman.com



HATSAN USA VELOX AIR PISTOL

Now available in OD Green, Black or FDE and in .22- and .25-caliber, the Velox Air Pistol from Hatsan USA is equipped with a new trigger system that has a light, smooth pull with a precise release. With two included detachable, caliber-specific, multi-shot magazines and onboard magazine storage in the grip, the Velox ensures seamless reloading and extended shooting sessions. A detachable 55cc air cylinder fills to 250 bar pressure, monitored by an external pressure gauge, and a threaded muzzle tip accommodates various sound moderators. Equipped with adjustable, a removable rear fiber-optic sight, the Velox's integrated optics rail supports both 11mm dovetail and 22mm Weaver optic mounts for added versatility. A checkered grip enhances control and comfort.

MSRP: $439.99-$472.99

www.hatsanairgunsusa.com



RAW HM1000 MICROHUNTER

The RAW HM1000 MicroHunter is a compact, high-performance air rifle designed for serious hunters and shooters who demand precision in a lightweight platform. Built on the proven HM1000 receiver, the MicroHunter features a 210cc aluminum bottle, a match-grade 8.5-inch barrel, and delivers impressive power and accuracy from a package just 27 inches long and 5.6 pounds in weight. Available in .177-, .22- and .25-caliber, it includes an adjustable regulator, fully adjustable two-stage trigger, BarkStripper air stripper and dual muzzle threading for suppressor compatibility. The spring-loaded butt pad and modular chassis make it highly ergonomic in the field. The MicroHunter is ideal for pest control, small-game hunting in tight terrain and precision shooting.

MSRP: $1,779.95

www.rapidairworx.com



UMAREX NITROAIR KOMPLETE NCR

Experience the future of shooting with Umarex's Komplete Nitrogen Cartridge Air Rifle, featuring a revolutionary disposable high-pressure nitrogen (N2) cartridge system. The Komplete NCR uses a single-use NitroAir cartridge filled with nitrogen at an impressive 3,600 psi. This .22-caliber PCP air rifle sends 11.9-grain pellets downrange at 975 fps, generating 25 foot-pounds of energy at the muzzle. It comes with two 10-round removable magazines and a 4x32mm scope and rings ready to mount on the rifle's Picatinny rail. It also has M-Lok slots on the bottom of the forearm so users can add an accessory rail and a bi-pod or other aftermarket shooting accessories. Since it uses nitrogen, a stable, non-toxic and abundant gas, it emits no harmful emissions.

MSRP: $219.99

www.umarexusa.com



WESTERN AIRGUNS MORDAX VENOM

Available in .22-, .25- and 30-caliber, the Mordax Venom from Western Airguns is equipped with a 300cc 300 bar air bottle, significantly increasing air capacity for more shots per fill. The Venom booster optimizes air delivery, increasing energy output up to an impressive 76 foot-pounds in .30-caliber to deliver unmatched stopping power for pest control and small-game hunting. Its extended folding buttstock, crafted from lightweight aluminum with a rubber shoulder pad and QD sling mounts, enhances stability and comfort, extending the length of pull to 14.5 inches for improved handling in its carbine configuration. The Venom features a USA-made barrel, removable magazine compatible with Western's Sidewinder series, adjustable front and rear sights and a full-length Picatinny rail.

MSRP: $2,395.99

www.airgunsofarizona.com

Conservation Corner

By RMEF Staff



iStockphoto.com/Jillian Cooper

RMEF Pushes for Immediate, Long-Term Action on Grizzly Bears

RMEF and partners urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to allow more state management and a clear path to delisting grizzly bears.

AS FEDERAL WILDLIFE OFFICIALS CONSIDER NEW RULES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF GRIZZLY BEARS, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and other conservation groups are urging increased state authority and policies that incentivize rather than penalize recovery goals.

In a March letter to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and acting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Paul Souza, RMEF, the Boone and Crockett Club, Property and Environment Research Center and Wyoming Wildlife Federation laid out clear steps the Trump administration can take to empower states in the short term while working toward the long-term goal of grizzly bear delisting.

"We recognize that the Service is also likely to revisit its decision not to delist recovered populations of grizzly bears, as it should," the letter states. "However, that lengthy — and likely litigious — process will prolong what is necessary for the continued conservation of the grizzly bear."

Montana and Wyoming had petitioned the Biden administration to delist grizzlies in the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems. Populations in both regions have far exceeded recovery goals with more than 1,000 bears each. The petitions sought delisting under long-held "distinct population segment" (DPS) rules, which allow the FWS to delist wildlife in recovered areas while maintaining federal protections in areas that remain below recovery goals.

In a January draft proposal, outgoing officials in the Biden administration decided against delisting Lower 48 grizzlies. And not only would federal management continue, but they proposed upending DPS designations for the Northern Continental Divide, Greater Yellowstone, Selkirk, Bitterroot, Cabinet-Yaak and North Cascade ecosystems in favor of a single, large DPS covering all grizzly habitat in the Lower 48. Officials argued the larger DPS would allow greater flexibility for agencies and private landowners to deal with livestock conflicts.

The Biden administration proposals saw criticism from elected officials in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho. RMEF Chief Conservation Officer Blake Henning described the proposal as "moving the goalposts" while rejecting established science that should be celebrating recovered grizzly populations.

Shortly after President Donald Trump was sworn in, incoming FWS officials put the brakes on the proposals. The recent letter from RMEF and its conservation partners urges a new path forward that would provide clarity and make states a stronger partner in grizzly management. The letter points out major flaws in FWS's rules that could set delisting back for generations. FWS found that because bears in the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems have significantly expanded their ranges in recent years, they are ineligible for delisting as individual DPSs because their ranges now nearly touch. The letter encourages officials to revise rules to not only eliminate penalties for a species successfully expanding its range, but also to better analyze the ecological relationship between grizzlies across the northern border in Canada.

"In the case of grizzlies below the 49th parallel, the flaws in the DPS policy artificially magnify concerns about bears below the line, disregard the distinctiveness of the recovery areas as originally defined and ignore Congressional direction to apply DPS policy only when needed to encourage genetic diversity," the letter states.

Areas Meeting Recovery Goals — Where populations are meeting recovery goals, rules should allow states to manage grizzlies by exempting them from the prohibition on "take." That would empower states in the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems to regulate take under their own laws and regulations rather than seeking federal approval.

"This would, in effect, give states much of the management authority they have sought through their delisting petitions," the letter states. "Considering that the Service denied those petitions on a technicality, exempting these populations from federal take regulation, would be a proper reward for the recovery of these populations."

State regulations may include hunting, which has become one of the standard talking points of opponents of delisting that claim it could drive populations down and threaten recovery. There is no reason to expect such a decline, the letter points out, as no recovered species has ever been relisted, and FWS could easily put in population safeguards or temporarily prohibit hunting to ensure species conservation.

Other Recovery Zones — In areas where grizzly populations have increased but remain below recovery goals, the letter urges rules providing for states to take over management gradually as populations progress. Metrics such as the number of females or mortality limits could then trigger greater state authority. The letter points out that using recovery goals as triggers for gradually ceding management has already been litigated and upheld in a case over the Mexican gray wolf.

"Using recovery goals as a trigger for gradually ceding management authority to states would create a clear incentive for states and other stakeholders to continue working on recovery for these populations," the letter states. "This approach would also avoid the risk that, when these populations reach their recovery goal, the Service will be blocked from recognizing that recovery and transferring management to states due to political and legal conflict."

Connectivity Areas — In areas identified as connectivity zones and where the FWS has not established recovery goals, the letter urges that states be given more authority to manage bears. Those authorities could include the ability to relocate or remove bears involved in conflicts without first seeking federal approval.

"Overly onerous federal regulation of these areas would merely penalize states and other stakeholders for grizzly bears' expanded range," the letter states.

New Products

1



2



3



4



1

ANGRY STAG AS-256 TRIMODE THERMAL SCOPES

The AS-256-15 and AS-256-20 are Angry Stag's entry level thermal scopes priced under $1,000, breaking the price barrier for full-featured U.S.-made thermal scopes. Angry Stag uses proprietary algorithms combined with full shutterless operation, resulting in the sharpest, most detailed images with no annoying shutters. These thermal scopes have a full array of features, such as seven color pallets, WiFi, PIP, multi-weapon platforms, multiple reticles, including a MOA ranging reticle, and a six language interface, to name a few. All Angry Stag scopes are field updatable and one-shot alignment. Other features include ThermaLoc mode, Daytime Calibration mode for clear daytime targeting and TriMode optics, allowing for use as a riflescope, clip-on or handheld device.

MSRP: $899/AS-256-15; $999/AS-256-20

www.angrystag.com

2

BARNES BULLETS RESERVE AMMO

The new Barnes Bullets Reserve Ammunition Line was designed specifically for hard-to-find and specialty hunting cartridges, and combines decades of ballistic expertise with the finest components and meticulous hand-loading by Barnes Bullets' in-house experts. Each cartridge is engineered with match-grade tolerances and undergoes rigorous testing to ensure the lowest standard deviations and exceptional accuracy in the field — a premium, handloaded solution for those seeking a decisive edge in the field. Created to fill the gap in hard-to-find hunting cartridges, the Barnes Reserve line reflects its commitment to quality and dedication to meeting the needs of its loyal customers. Available in .257 Whby. Mag., 6.8 Western, 6.5-284 Norma, .300 Super WSM, 7mm SAUM and .300 SAUM.

MSRP: $99-$119/Box of 20

www.barnesbullets.com

3

BCT SUPPRESSOR CLEANING KIT

Breakthrough Clean Technologies' Premium Suppressor Cleaner Kit provides an effortless suppressor cleaning process with a comprehensive kit that includes everything needed for thorough suppressor maintenance. Based on the effectiveness and success of its cleaning solution, the BCT Suppressor Cleaning Kit was developed to make the entire process of cleaning suppressors easier and much more effective. The kit includes 16 ounces of suppressor cleaner solution, which was engineered to dissolve the toughest carbon deposits and fouling. Also included is a soaking tube, two specialized brushes, a retrieval tool and an organized tool tray.

MSRP: $69.99

www.breakthroughclean.com

4

CHIAPPA FIREARMS 86 WILDLANDS TAKEDOWN

The 86 Wildlands Angle Ejection Takedown from Chiappa Firearms is a modern take on the old lever-action classic. Chambered in .45/70 Govt., it is built with a 1:18 twist 16.5-inch barrel and a magazine tube capacity of 4+1, and is a heavy hitter, shot after shot. The barrel is 5/8x24 threaded for attaching muzzle devices, thread protectors, recoil mitigation devices or suppressors. The stock is skeletonized with an adjustable comb and outfitted with an attachment point for accessories or cartridge holders. An integrated adjustable cheek rest allows for precise comfort. The forend is made from overbuilt aluminum with M-Lok adaptability and features an over receiver rail for optics attachment.

MSRP: $2,013.33

www.chiappafirearms.com

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5

KUIU ALPINE COLD-WEATHER JACKET

KUIU's new Alpine Jacket — available in both hooded and non-hooded versions — offers wind- and water-resistant performance in a lightweight, fleece-lined 100 percent polyester soft shell design, and a quiet, two-layer bonded fabric construction combines durability with stealth, while four-way stretch allows for unrestricted movement in technical terrain. The Alpine was designed for strategic layering, serving as an outer shell over a base layer and fleece mid-layer in mild to cold weather (32–70°F). Both versions feature articulated patterning with a drop back hem for comfort and coverage when glassing or seated, along with essential storage options including zippered hand pockets, an internal drop pocket for gloves or a beanie and a zippered chest pocket for quick-access to gear.

MSRP: $239/Jacket;
$259/Hooded jacket

www.kuiu.com

6

LEUPOLD VX-5HD GEN 2 2-10X42MM RIFLESCOPE

The VX-5HD Gen 2 2-10x42mm Riflescope from Leupold combines a broad sight picture at 2X with the precision hunters need to reach out to 10X. Built around Leupold's Professional-Grade Optical System, the VX-5HD Gen 2 2-10x42mm delivers exceptional light transmission and razor-sharp clarity from edge to edge — ideal in low-light or high-glare situations. Its Guard-Ion lens coating repels dirt, moisture and smudges, keeping the image clear in all conditions. An illuminated reticle, fast-focus eyepiece and integrated throw lever help users react faster when seconds matter. Waterproof and fogproof, and backed by enhanced competition-grade adjustments and a tool-free SpeedSet elevation dial, this scope is built for serious performance in the field.

MSRP: $1,499.99

www.leupold.com

7

TRISTAR ARMS KR22 .22 LR RIFLE

TriStar Arms has announced the launch of the KR22, a lightweight and ergonomic .22 LR rifle designed for target shooting, small-game hunting and training scenarios. It offers a balanced blend of comfort, agility and precision, making it an ideal choice for both novice and experienced shooters. Its lightweight design ensures fast, reliable and accurate performance across diverse shooting conditions. Powered by a precise blow-back semi-automatic action chambered in .22 LR, the KR22 ensures dependable cycling. Its safety system features both a push-button safety (blocking the trigger when engaged) and an inner trigger safety that must be pulled toward the trigger when the push-button safety is disengaged. It comes with two 10-round rotary magazines and is compatible with standard 10/22 magazines.

MSRP: $289

www.tristararms.com

8

ZONE PROTECTS WARHAWGS ATTRACTANT

Zone Protects has launched a powerful new wild hog attractant — Realtree Fatal Attraction Warhawgs — a long-range scent bomb designed to pull feral hogs in from over a mile out. Built for serious hog control, it combines a rotting apple-corn-sugar scent profile with explosive dispersal capability, triggering aggressive feeding frenzies in destructive boars and rogue sows. This is not just bait — it's a trap in a bottle. Spray it near trails or bait piles and watch wild hogs charge in. But Warhawgs does more — it honors America's heroes. A portion of the proceeds from every bottle sold supports Warhawgs, a nonprofit organization that takes disabled veterans on fully guided wild hog hunts. Tested in the field by warriors. Proven in the backwoods.

MSRP: $17.95/8 ounces;
$34.95/16 ounces

www.zoneprotects.com

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PRO STAFF:
Judd received a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from South Dakota State Community College. He's worked for Alaska Fish & Game and as a conservation officer for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. He's a lifelong predator hunter and trapper and runs a successful whitetail and turkey outfitting business in Iowa. *editors@predatorxtreme.com*

Best of the Best Predator Rifles

THE COYOTE WAS OBVIOUSLY "ROAD SHY." IT COMPLETELY IGNORED THE PLAINTIVE, MOANING SQUALLS FROM MY MOUTH CALL, SITTING MOTIONLESS ON AN IRRIGATION DIKE ACROSS THE PASTURE FROM THE EDGE OF A COUNTY ROAD. My favorite predator rifle, a super accurate pre-64 Winchester chambered in .220 Swift and equipped with a custom Fajen laminated walnut stock, was rock steady in the notch I had scooped into the top of the plowed snowbank I was hidden behind. I had done lots of long-range shooting with this outfit at prairie dogs and rock chucks and taken coyotes and foxes at 300 yards, but this canine was going to be a challenge, registering just over 550 yards on my rangefinder.

I centered the crosshairs of my Nikon scope, set on 12X, just over the coyote's head, tugged the trigger and almost instantaneously saw snow kick up on the hillside right behind it. My immediate thought was that I had shot high, but then in seemingly slow motion the coyote simply toppled over without a quiver — my farthest shot ever at 557 yards.

A predator rifle doesn't get much better than that, but my Swift was "ruined" a short time later by a master gunsmith friend. He was on a spring bear hunt with me, and I showed him some stock blanks I had collected. He quickly glommed onto a gorgeously figured piece of Myrtlewood I had acquired some 20 years earlier and fitted my .220, which he re-barreled with a new accurized Shilen barrel, with a custom stock made from that Myrtlewood blank. A stunning tight-grouping beauty of a rifle that I retired except for rare excursions.

My first predator rifles, used mainly for hunting foxes while I was in high school, were a Model 94 Winchester .30-30 Win. and a .30-caliber surplus WWII carbine. Their best attribute was the ability to get a fox running in high gear and keep it going while I filled the air with near misses.

During my first year in college at Brookings, South Dakota, I hit it off with an old German gunsmith who I helped on occasion in his shop, and ended up trading him my two rifles, some cash and some work time for an FN-actioned, Douglas-barreled, medium-weight, .22-250 Rem., which at the time was still classified as a wildcat cartridge. Under the gunsmith's tutelage, I glass bedded the stock, honed the action, lapped the barrel and worked up handloads that grouped consistently under an inch. Over the next several years, that rifle paid for itself several times over, downing several hundred winter-white white-tailed jackrabbits that fetched a buck each on the carcass.

During my senior year, I was shooting jackrabbits one afternoon and a local rancher watched as my two companions pushed through a shelterbelt he had given us permission to hunt. I flattened 23 of the critters from one location and let him take six more with my rifle. At the end of the hunt, he made me an offer that was three times what I figured the rifle was worth. I finally relented and sold it to him.

I spent the next several years swapping between the completely rebuilt Model 64 .220 Swift and several custom 6mms, which originally hit the market as the .244 Remington caliber. I built my first one while I was in the army because I wanted a varmint gun that could also be used for big game — a medium-weight rifle with an FN action. Over the next few years while in the Army and working for Colorado Game and Fish, I took elk, mule deer, a bighorn ram, pronghorns and a bunch of foxes and coyotes with that gun. The only drawback to the 6mm as a predator rifle was that even with a lightweight 75-grain bullet it wasn't very fur friendly.

In 1965, Remington, Ruger and Kimber started production of rifles chambered in .22-250 as a factory cartridge and I soon had all three to field test. I fell in love with the Kimber Pro Varmint model, and with a bit of stock work and glass bedding, barrel lapping and honing and action smoothing work, turned the rifle into an even more deadly predator producer. My last encounter was with a pair of coyotes on one of my baits, where I flattened the farthest canine at 440 yards and his confused and hesitant companion at 400 yards. Predator rifles don't get much more effective than that.

"My first predator rifles, used mainly for hunting foxes while I was in high school, were a Model 94 Winchester .30-30 Win. and a .30-caliber surplus WWII carbine."

My latest predator-punching acquisition is a lightweight, fast-action Bushmaster AR-15 chambered in .223 Rem. This was a rifle format I avoided like the plague until a good friend and full-time predator damage control specialist, Byron South, got me a Bushmaster AR to field test. The accuracy and ease of handling were real eye openers, and when fur prices skyrocketed that Bushmaster and my Remington R-15 fur friendly .223s were my constant predator-calling companions.

Through the years, the .220 Swift was always my key predator rifle and accounted for over 500 predators and uncountable varmints before my gunsmithing buddy made it a showpiece I retired.

If I had to choose a single predator/varminter caliber rifle today, it would be the .22-250 Remington loaded with 52-grain hollowpoint bench rest bullets to a velocity of 3,700 fps. With such an outfit, I'd be ready for any critter from gophers to Alaskan wolves.

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FOXDATA	RECORDS INFORMATION ALLOWING YOU TO ANTICIPATE ANIMAL ACTIVITY	YES	YES
FOXPILOT	ADVANCED AUTO-CALLING	—	YES
PRO HUNTS	SEQUENCES CREATED BY PRO-STAFF	10 (PRE-LOADED)	10 (PRE-LOADED)
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SOUND QUALITY		32-bit (ULTRASONIC)	32-bit (ULTRASONIC)
DECOYS		— (NONE INCLUDED / CAN BE PURCHASED SEPARATELY)	2 (BUILT-IN / VARIABLE SPEED)
BLUETOOTH®		YES	YES
MUSIC MODE		—	YES
WEIGHT SCALE		YES	YES
BATTERIES		UNIT - 10,000 mAh lithium Battery and Charger Included | REMOTE - 4AA Not Included	UNIT - 10,000 mAh lithium Battery and Charger Included | REMOTE - 4AA Not Included
DIMENSIONS		8.25" x 11.5" x 10.5"	13.5" x 12.25" x 6.75"
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