

Hunting the coyote



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No animal presents a greater challenge

By HAROLD HARTON
Special Contributor

Hunting the coyote is my favorite, with the possible exception of prairie dog hunting, and I am not sure which is first.

In my opinion, there is no animal that presents a greater challenge than the coyote. I'm sure there is a good chance that the very last sound on earth when all life is about gone will be the howl of the coyote. He is tough and adaptable to whatever nature hands him for survival.

The coyote has proven it can survive. Its range is from Alaska to Florida and from Maine to California, plus all over Mexico and Canada. Coyotes also have been found living within the city limits of large urban areas, and feeding on pet cats and dogs.

The scientific name is *canis latrans*, which means barking dog.

One reason the coyote can survive is that it will eat almost anything from bugs to carrion. Its color ranges from almost white to black, and the coat in the northern areas is very heavy, long and desirable in the fur industry. In warmer climates, the coat is not desirable.

Once on a hunt in South Texas, I killed a coyote that had mange so bad there was hardly any fur left. On that hunt, other hunters killed other mangy coyotes.

The coyote ranges out from its den for food for several miles if necessary, but the den usually is near water.

Breeding is normally from January to March, and the size of the litter can be

from two or three pups to as many as eight or 10, depending on food supply. This is one of the survival traits of the coyote; nature takes care of the litter size based on food supply.

Coyotes have a communication system that works well for them, but one way to fool them is with the siren. They can't resist answering a siren, so that is a tool for locating coyotes. They are mostly nocturnal, so the siren is best done at night.

Hunting can be done at night also, but I prefer late afternoon and early morning, when they are beginning their night hunt or coming back to the den.

No animal has a better nose than the coyote. It is true the bear has a good nose, but I am convinced it is no better than the coyote's.

Size for a grown coyote ranges from about 20 pounds to 50 pounds, and he can move that body fast. The coyote has been clocked at 40 miles per hour.

In hunting coyotes, several rules must be observed: use camouflage clothing, scent cover and even then use the wind in your face. Back up into brush or next to a large corner fence post. Hide in hay bales out in a field, but break up your outline. Be sure your face and hands are covered with camouflage. And it is wise to cover your firearm with camouflage, too.

When beginning a call, start with a low-volume range just in case an unseen coyote is nearby. Don't scare him off with a loud blast. After a couple of low calls, you can turn up the volume on the electric call, or if you are using a mouth call just



PHOTOS BY HAROLD HARTON

In hunting coyotes, use camouflage clothing, scent cover and even then use the wind in your face. Here, my son, Hal, holds a coyote he killed.

blow a bit harder.

A real nice tool is a fake animal bait that wiggles and gets the attention of the animal. This works well with the electronic calls and when placed out a good way from the hunter, it gives a better chance for the shooter to get a shot.

What rifle should be used? Well, that depends on what you have, but everything from the .22 long rifle to the largest deer rifle and all size shotguns have been used, but one of my favorites for the last many years is a Model 600 Remington .222. I

would say the .22-250 would be one of the favorites of most calling hunters.

Hunting with several hunters posted out in the right arrangement can be most productive. The first hunt I went on in South Texas and the first call we made, eight coyotes came at once, and we killed five. That is the only time that has ever happened to me.

Even the most professional coyote hunters are made fools of by the coyote, so don't be surprised if you get skunked by just about the smartest animal in the country.