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# THE USE OF DOGS AND CALLS TO TAKE COYOTES AROUND DENS AND RESTING AREAS

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**ABSTRACT:** The use of dogs and calls to take coyotes (*Canis latrans*) around dens and resting areas has been used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Animal Damage Control program for many years. This technique, when properly employed, is highly selective, humane, and very effective. In more remote, inaccessible areas it is one of the most cost-effective control methods currently available. Current and future public sentiment, as expressed in Legislative mandate, may oblige ADC to depend on methods perceived as more humane and selective. Dogs may become a more important control tool in the not-so-distant future. This technique and its applications are described.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the current surge of interest in animal welfare the future use of some key ADC control tools (steel leghold traps, snares, etc.) is under increasing scrutiny. For this reason ADC personnel need to develop new control methods and perfect their skills with the existing, less-offensive techniques. One technique not universally employed, but extremely effective at certain times of the year and in certain habitat types, is the use of dogs to take coyotes around dens or resting areas. These dogs can be used to lure adult coyotes into shooting range, by taking advantage of their protective instincts, or to catch young coyotes. Young coyotes are either run down and killed by the dogs or bayed in dens and hiding places. The technique works well from the time the young are born until they leave the family group. Some adult coyotes will fight dogs throughout the year.

Coyotes can be particularly destructive to livestock during the denning season because of the need for extra food for the adults and their young. Removal of the young, or killing of the adults associated with them, oftentimes mitigates resource losses near these groups. Till (1982) demonstrated that the removal of offending adults and pups decreased the number of predation incidents (events) on domestic sheep in southcentral Wyoming by 98.2%. Removing only litters of pups resulted in an 87.7% decrease in predation incidents. In remote, inaccessible areas this technique is one of the most cost-effective control methods currently available. The purpose of this paper is to explain in as much detail as possible the technique and its application as a valuable ADC tool. The use of calls around these dens and resting areas, singularly or in conjunction with dogs, will also be examined.

## SELECTING A DOG

A variety of different breeds and types of dogs can be trained to be good "decoy" dogs. Many of the shepherd and terrier breeds make excellent decoy or denning dogs as well as many crosses of these breeds with hounds and curs. Most possess the desire to chase by sight or trail by scent, are intelligent enough to learn the behavior expected of them and tend not to pursue coyotes too far to be effective. Progeny of dogs used for hunting coyotes or other game, proven dogs, are more likely to possess the natural instinct to hunt than others not having hunting backgrounds. The type of dog to avoid is one that chases coyotes too far and too aggressively. (Most hound breeds fall into this category.) This kind of dog can be used to catch young coyotes, but if adults are around

they will generally lead such a dog on a long, unproductive chase.

Initial training of a "decoy" dog should start on the trapline. Young dogs should be encouraged to find and bay coyotes caught in traps. The hunter also needs to break the dog from running nontarget animals such as deer, pigs, and others. This task is best accomplished by using an electric collar but can also be done manually. The age at which training should commence varies according to a young dog's maturity, temperament, and desire. Immature dogs tend not to be serious enough to learn, and submissive types may be ruined by starting them too early. Aggressive coyotes can scare submissive types badly enough to inhibit future chase behavior. Many young dogs start out being too aggressive but settle down with age and experience. Very often a dog's first or second encounter with a pair of angry and aggressive adult coyotes defending young convinces the dog of the futility of such confrontations. Dogs that continue to pursue coyotes too far after several such encounters should not be used for decoying adults. Young dogs that show no interest in coyotes, when by themselves or with other trained dogs, by 8 to 10 months of age should also be avoided. Some dogs develop later in life, but if the hunter needs to get started quickly, it is best to start with a dog having some natural tendencies.

Once a young dog starts finding and baying coyotes in traps it is ready for use around dens. Most experienced ADC Specialists prefer dogs that bay (bark at) coyotes over dogs that fight or kill without barking. The noise allows the hunter to get set up properly for any incoming adult coyotes and also enables the hunter to find bayed pups. Individual dogs behave differently, and in time a hunter learns how his particular dog or dogs will react around groups of coyotes and uses this knowledge to his advantage. Most dogs' behavior will change with age and experience and the hunter needs to adapt to this change as it occurs. Regardless of the breed, many types of dogs can be used to lure adults into shooting range. Others will also learn how to catch pups or bay them in den holes and hiding places. Oftentimes young dogs need to work with trained dogs in order to learn how to hold young coyotes at bay or kill them. The "ideal" decoy dog actually performs two tasks: first it lures the adult coyotes into shooting range, then it ferrets out the young and bays or kills them.

## LOCATING COYOTES

Several methods are used to locate coyote dens or areas

where coyote adults with young are living. The most commonly used locator is either an electric (12 volt) or manually operated siren. These sirens come in many sizes and shapes and range in price from \$20.00 to \$500.00. J.C. Whitney has several types listed in their catalog and many can be obtained from local police and fire departments or ambulance services. The most important thing is to look for a siren with the right pitch. Some sirens will not wind up enough and therefore are less desirable. Experience with a variety of sirens will eventually lead to the selection of one that the individual feels works best. Very large and loud sirens can elicit howling responses from coyotes so far away that the hunter cannot hear them. Very small sirens do not cover the country as well but when the coyotes do bark or howl, generally a good location can be obtained. The larger sirens allow a hunter to monitor more country in a day; and if barking coyotes cannot be pinpointed that day, at least the hunter knows they are in the area and can find them at a later time.

Some groups of coyotes will not answer a siren, some will answer reluctantly, others will answer almost every time they hear one. Very often a group of coyotes will answer once, then will not answer again for quite some time. These groups are the most difficult to pinpoint unless, when they answer, they are close. The idea is to get as an exact location as possible once the coyotes answer. Some of the reluctant groups can often be located at night with the siren.

Many ADC Specialists who have used sirens quite extensively to locate coyotes believe the first "blow" should be of short duration, winding the siren up to the desired pitch, then shutting it down abruptly with a braking device. This allows the hunter more time to pinpoint coyotes which start barking immediately and others which may only bark once or twice. The hunter should always be careful not to have his vehicle or himself too exposed while using the siren. Very often coyotes will come to the siren or get to a spot where they can determine the origin of the sound. If the hunter or vehicle is in plain sight, they will associate the siren sound with danger. The second "blow" of the siren can be a little different than the first. A very effective method used is to wind the siren up to a sub-maximal pitch, then let it tail off slightly, then wind it up again to a slightly higher RPM and let it tail off, then wind it up as fast as it will go for 5 to 10 seconds, let it tail off slightly, then stop it abruptly. If the coyotes do not answer in 5 minutes, try it one more time, then move on. Sometimes, changing locations slightly or blowing the siren in a different direction will elicit a response.

Most experienced ADC Specialists feel that the early morning hours are best for locating family groups of coyotes. Different weather patterns can also affect the howling response of coyotes (Alcorn 1946). Some groups of coyotes will answer the siren more than once in a short period of time. This usually allows the hunters or hunter to get a better location if they move in closer to the coyotes before blowing the siren the second time. As one becomes more experienced at pinpointing barking coyotes, he or she will be less dependent on the coyotes barking a second time. Surprisingly, it is oftentimes very difficult to pinpoint the exact location of a barking group of coyotes. If two or more ADC Specialists are hunting together, it is best to spread out while listening in order to better triangulate the barking. Experience will also help the hunter distinguish between groups of barking pups and adults as opposed to groups of

yearlings or others. Older coyotes tend to have lower-pitched barks and howls.

Other devices used to locate coyotes are the coyote horns or howler calls. These devices are used to imitate the howl or bark of a coyote and can provoke howling responses from groups or individual coyotes. The horn is usually an old truck horn or the bell end of a trumpet, bugle, trombone, or coronet. Plastic oil funnels also work well and a commercial call and horn are available from Lohman. The reeds used with these horns vary, but most ADC Specialists use the OLT D-2 duck call reed. Other commercial duck call reeds as well as many homemade reeds also work well. A commercial howler call (Austin) is also available. This call can be used without a horn to amplify the sound. Practice and experience with these calls and horns will lead one to techniques that work best for the individual doing the calling. When using the howler call or coyote horn to locate coyotes, the same principles apply as when using the siren. Some ADC Specialists believe a single howl works best; others use various barks and howls to get groups to bark. If a group is close when they answer the horn or howler, it is best to get concealed as quickly as possible and wait. Coyotes quite often come to these calls. Even if coyotes do not bark, the hunter should be alert for individuals that may come in silently.

A third method used to locate family groups or denning sites is to physically find the den or associated playgrounds (areas where the pups play, thus matting down the grass or creating paths and disturbed areas). In some parts of the country coyotes can be tracked back to dens; in others, playgrounds can be spotted from a distance. Coyotes tend to den in the same areas year after year. They may not be in the same hole but will be in the same drainage or on the same ridge. Multiple coyote sightings, highly localized coyote sign, or rancher reports of coyotes fighting stock dogs usually indicate that coyotes are denning in an area. Physically located dens are easier to work with because the hunter knows the exact location and can set up his hunt plan accordingly. A hunter has to be very careful about leaving sign around den sites because adults will usually move their young after humans have encroached.

## TAKING THE COYOTES AFTER LOCATING Use of Calls Around a Den or Resting Site.

Once a group of coyotes has been located with the siren, horn, or physically located using the techniques described above, it is time to try the calls and dogs. If the coyotes have been located in the middle of a hot day, it is often advantageous to come back the following morning when it is cooler. The dogs and calls seem to be more effective at this time of day providing the adults are back from hunting jaunts. If the group was located using a siren or horn, it is always best to wait for approximately one-half hour to an hour before trying the calls or dogs. This prevents the coyotes from associating sirens and horns with danger. The only time this is not done is when you are trying to catch pups with the dogs after the adults have been taken, or you suspect the group will move when they hear the siren.

There are several different calling techniques used to lure adult coyotes or older pups into rifle or shotgun range once a group has been pinpointed. The horn or howler works quite well, especially when two hunters spread out when close to the coyotes, and answer back and forth to each other. Various predator calls will lure the adults and older pups into

range. The hand siren wound up to high RPMs, then shut down quickly, works very well on older pups. The "pup squeaker" will also bring the adults in quickly, especially if it is used in conjunction with a barking dog. Points to keep in mind when setting up to call are:

- 1) Come in downwind of the group to get setup.
- 2) Make sure you are well concealed before you start calling.
- 3) Once you start calling, stay in the same spot for at least 1 hour (coyotes have been known to come in 2 hours after initiating calling).
- 4) Get into a spot where you will be comfortable sitting for an hour and can shoot in most directions.
- 5) Be very alert, as most coyotes seem to appear suddenly.
- 6) If a coyote is called in and shot or missed, do not think the hunt is over. Many times you can continue to call and take other coyotes.

If the hunter does not feel comfortable with hand-blown calls, many electronic calls are available. Three distinct advantages to these electronic calls are: 1) the hunter's hands are free to operate a firearm, 2) the speakers can be set out away from the hunter so that incoming coyotes are not focused on the hunter himself, and 3) the hunter does not have to move to do the calling. Most ADC Specialists feel that only adult coyotes should be shot in the initial stages of working a group, especially if these adults seem aggressive. If both adults can be dispatched, the young coyotes are easier to trap, shoot, take with M-44s, or catch with trailing dogs. Groups of coyotes with aggressive adults can often be worked more than once resulting in the take of other adults.

#### Use of Dogs Around a Den or Resting Site.

If calling does not work or the coyotes have been worked with calls and are no longer responding, then it is time to try your dog or dogs. The way in which dogs are used by experienced ADC Specialists varies a great deal. Some believe four or five dogs can be used effectively, others think one works best. Some ADC Specialists believe small dogs are less inclined to frighten coyotes and therefore work better. Some feel the dog or dogs need to catch a young coyote to get things going.

Many things will work, but one that invariably does not is when your dog or dogs follow an adult out of the area and do not return. When approaching a group of coyotes, it is always best to approach from downwind, allowing the dog or dogs to work in on the wind as you get concealed in a good spot. If the day is calm, quite often the dog or dogs will find the coyotes by following a track back to the den or resting area. If the adult coyotes are aggressive they will usually attack the dog or dogs as soon as they get close to the den or pups. Very often the adults will try to lure the dogs away from their young. They do this by simply running away; or if that does not work, they may come back and nip a dog or

bark at it trying to get it to follow. The ideal type of dog to have at this point is one that will only chase or fight the adults a short time then return to you, or ignore the adults and catch a young coyote. Usually the adults will follow the dog after a fight. More aggressive dogs will stay out longer with the adults but most will return if a pair of coyotes gets serious about fighting.

Once you have determined that the coyotes are agitated, barking, or fighting with the dogs, stay put. When the dog or dogs return or run by chasing pups or adults, very often another adult will be following. If a dog catches a young coyote on the ground or bays it in a hole or in the den, sometimes it is better to slip in close and shoot adults coming in to fight with the dog. If you know your dog will not stay with a bayed pup after an adult coyote comes in, wait until the adult chases the dog back to you. Many things can happen when the dogs get into the coyotes but the main thing is to be patient and stay put.

If two or three ADC Specialists are hunting together, it is often good to station one hunter back away from the action where he can overlook the general area. Quite frequently adult coyotes will pull back and get up onto a vantage point and bark or observe. This hunter may be able to shoot these coyotes as well as others circling the area. Another trick which works very well when the hunter is in close to the den or pups is to get a dog to bark while blowing a "pup squeaker." The hunter can also use a tape recording of dogs barking or use the recording while a pup squeaker is blown. If both adults can be taken using the methods explained above, the pups can be dealt with quite easily. Larger pups can be trapped, called, killed with M-44s, or run down with trailing dogs. Smaller pups will generally hide in the den or other hiding spots and can be found with a good dog. These small pups can also be captured using the methods used on larger pups or gassed with denning cartridges. A dog that will go into a den and bring out young coyotes comes in handy once an occupied den is located.

In conclusion, the methods and techniques described in this paper can be used quite effectively to take depredated coyotes. These methods and techniques, when used properly, are also very selective and humane.

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