

**When it's so cold it hurts to breathe,**

**Here's how to ring the dinner bell.**



By Mark Kayser

The extreme chill of the outdoors hit me as soon as I tossed aside the bed covers. It wasn't a good sign, since I was indoors at the time. Unfortunately, the bitter temperature didn't seem to sway my sensibility. I shuffled into the kitchen, rubbed my contact-less, blurry eyes and saw that the digital thermometer read 12 below zero. Instead of retreating back to the warmth of a down comforter and flannel-clad spouse, I readied for a morning of subzero coyote hunting. I've never claimed to be a tough old salt, but I do know that when I'm suffering, so are the coyotes. That pain sparks an increased interest in a free meal when coyotes hear the cries of a predator call.

Except for a Hostess Twinkie delivery truck dropping off baked goods, few ventured out on the frosty predawn morning. To avoid alarming any coyotes, I parked a full mile from my calling site and walked into the setup in complete darkness. Lying prone proved too cold, so I sat on my duff until shooting light. The Heatmax packets were working overtime in my mittens as I unleashed my first howl. Immediately, a coyote in the next drainage answered and we traded howls for several minutes. Fearing I was being too friendly, I stopped to incite action, but before I could use a distress call a coyote rushed my position faster than a Wal-Mart shopper swerving to

secure a prime parking spot. It wasn't the conversationalist, but a second, silent coyote loped in to see if all the talking meant something tasty. I quickly ended that coyote's hunt and kicked off my own with a single shot from my .22-250.

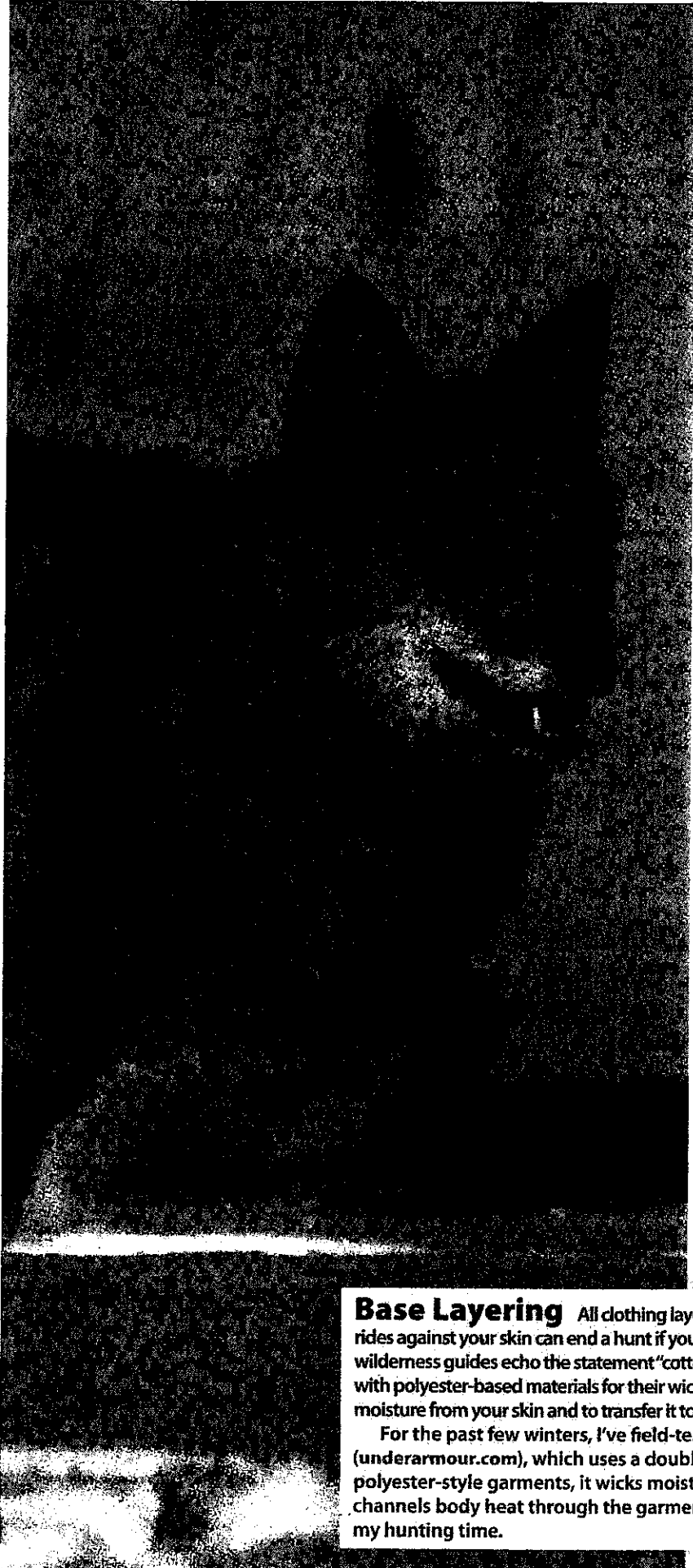
As the injected rush of adrenaline dissipated, it dawned on me that my feet and hands were already numbing from the hour-long hunt, but I knew I'd quickly warm up when I dragged out the big male coyote I'd just shot.

#### Coyotes in the Cold

Several factors regulate why coyote-calling success increases in cold weather. First of all, coyotes simply need more calories to survive in



Photo: Mitch Kezar/WindigoImages.com



winter. Although coyotes participating in caloric-intake studies are about as rare as NRA members displaying "Hillary Clinton in 2008" bumper stickers, you can make some educated assumptions based on other warm-blooded animals.

For instance, veterinarians recommend boosting the winter diet of a domesticated outdoor dog by 10 to 15 percent for a sedentary animal. On the opposite end of the spectrum, competitive sled dogs routinely eat 5,000 calories or more daily during a race, and one study puts the intake at 10,000 calories a day. The average human diet revolves around an intake of approximately 2,000 calories a day and dietitians recommend boosting that to 2,500 when doing outdoor activities in cold weather.

Military studies also point to an increase in calories of at least 25 to 50 percent for cold-weather operations; for example, an average male soldier burns approximately 3,200 calories per day, but that energy requirement may increase to approximately 4,500 calories per day for males in winter operations.

What do sled dogs and soldiers have to do with coyote hunting? Warm-blooded animals require more calories in the winter to keep the fire stoked. Without additional calories, warm-blooded animals quickly deteriorate with the subzero conditions and the physical demands of traveling in snowbound landscapes. Unlike sled dogs that get a salmon treat or soldiers that rely on MREs, coyotes have to scrounge up their own meals—further burning crucial calories.

A second factor that comes into play is the barren winter landscape. With some rodents taking a long winter siesta and others finding safety underneath the snow, the shelves are bare, which forces coyotes to work harder,

**Base Layering** All clothing layers play an equal role, but the base layer that rides against your skin can end a hunt if you make the wrong choice. Mountaineers and wilderness guides echo the statement "cotton kills." When choosing a base layer, stick with polyester-based materials for their wicking characteristic to remove sweat and moisture from your skin and to transfer it to an outer layer of clothing.

For the past few winters, I've field-tested Under Armour's Coldgear ([underarmour.com](http://underarmour.com)), which uses a double-sided microfiber fabric. Like many polyester-style garments, it wicks moisture away from your body, but it also channels body heat through the garment's weave. Under Armour has extended my hunting time.



onger and occasionally to resort to less-than-favorable food sources.

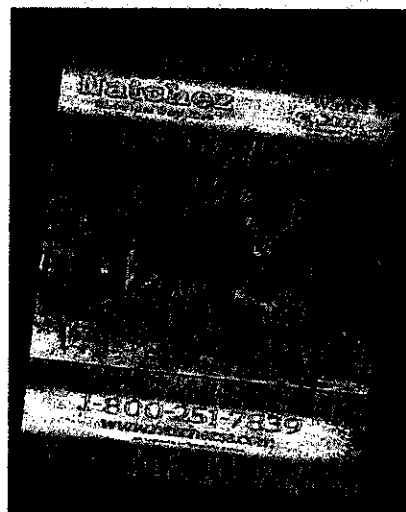
Studies in Wisconsin, which is a frequent supplier of subzero readings on national weather maps, indicate winter coyotes increase their take of carrion. One study completed in southeastern Wisconsin by wildlife biologists noted that approximately half the diet of winter coyotes consisted of livestock and poultry carrion. Rabbits made up the next largest portion, accounting for 21 percent of the diet, and other small mammals, including mice, made up 18 percent of the intake. Surprisingly, plants accounted for approximately 12 percent of the winter calories. Another study in northwest Wisconsin found that deer carrion made up 35 percent of a winter coyote's diet, rodents 19 percent, snowshoe hares 6 percent, other mammals 26 percent, birds 4 percent and vegetation 5 percent.

Besides feeding heavily on carrion, coyotes will also clan together to increase hunting efficiency and success. By banding together in wolf-like packs, coyotes can increase their success on larger game like deer or pronghorn.

During a particularly severe winter

## Quick Tips for Warmth

- 1** Dress light for the drive to your setups. Keep the truck heat on low.
- 2** To reduce sweating, pack your extra clothes to your calling location and add the layers when you arrive.
- 3** Wear loose clothing and boots to allow your own heat to circulate.
- 4** Wear polyester-based materials next to your body for wicking qualities.
- 5** To trap heat, layer, layer and layer your clothing.
- 6** At least 30 percent of your body heat can be lost through the head, so wear a facemask and cap.
- 7** Use air-activated warmers in strategic locations, such as kidneys, feet and hands.
- 8** Always tell someone your location, in case you don't return from a subzero outing.

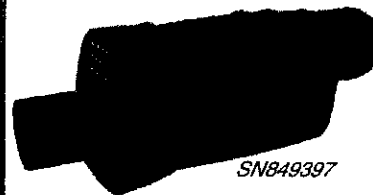


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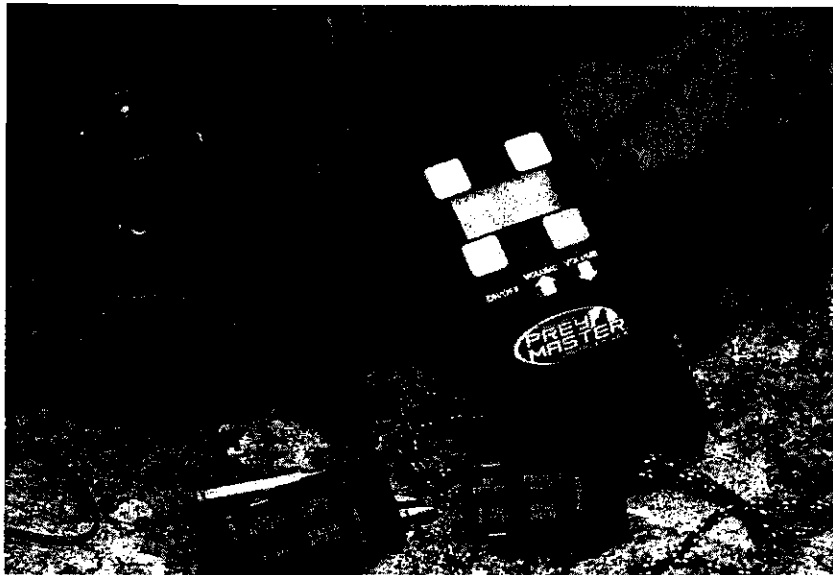
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Several years back, I had a pack of coyotes beat me to a kill. Using a tree stand on a morning bowhunt for whitetails, I watched a limping buck retreat to a bedding area. Realizing the buck didn't have much of a chance for survival in the deep snow and sub-zero nights, I decided to stalk it and get it out of its misery (and load my freezer). The buck, although severely wounded, still had enough energy to evade me. I could tell from its feeble escape, however, that I would be able

to arrow it later in the day.

I grabbed lunch and returned to the stalk a few hours later. The sight I witnessed was nothing less than incredible. Based on the tracks, the buck had retreated to a bed above a frozen river, but a pack of coyotes crossed its trail and took up the chase. In less than 200 yards, the coyotes dragged down the buck and not only killed it, but completely devoured it. The rack, scattered bones, hair and hooves were all that remained of the buck I had pursued

just a few hours earlier. That's what I call coyote fast food.

### Calls to Warm the Soul

As the Wisconsin study indicates, and any veteran coyote hunter will tell you, coyotes take advantage of carrion whenever possible, especially when Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard is bare. Since carrion has long since quit squealing and call makers have yet to create a carrion call (though I'll bet they're working on one), you'll want to look at options lower down on the coyote's grocery list. Without question, prey-in-distress calls should be your first choice.

The ever-popular dying-rabbit call and jackrabbit-in-distress calls may be the only sounds you have to use when severe temperatures dominate the weather map. Besides being a top dining choice of coyotes, these two calls won't leave you asking the question: "Can you hear me now?" Cottontail- and jackrabbit-distress calls have a piercing tone that may extend a mile or more, depending on the terrain, wind and brush density of your calling area. On many occasions, I've watched coyotes

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come from nearly a mile away when I used such calls in wide-open terrain.

If you don't get any respect using those calls, consider whether other hunters in the area may be using the same calls and thereby educating the coyotes. If so, switch calls. As the studies indicate, coyotes also prey on other small animals and birds. If you have the ability to sneak in close to suspected coyote bedding areas, try a rodent squeaker. The sound doesn't carry far, but I have watched coyotes react to the high-pitched squeaks from more than 400 yards away.

For the ability to duplicate the volume of rabbit-in-distress calls, try some of the more popular distress calls such as fawn, woodpecker and even canine. Fawns represent a bigger dining opportunity, while woodpecker cries send a message of despair. Coyotes also react to canine-distress calls for several reasons: Female coyotes respond out of motherly instinct, whereas males often rush in for a chance to dominate another coyote. I think many coyotes, however, just respond out of curiosity. Regardless of the reason, canine-distress calls often lure in otherwise call-shy coyotes.

### Realism Helps

Without question, the best combination I have used for calling in subzero coyotes includes a mixture of distress and confidence calls. I generally start out my setups with a coyote-greeting howl, which is a mellow, drawn-out howl telling other coyotes: "I'm here." Coyotes use a wide range of howls, barks, yips and whines to communicate. For the most part, steer clear of barks, which represent a warning.

It's not at all uncommon for a coyote to show up and investigate an intruder in its territory. After two or three howls and a 10-minute wait, I begin a series of prey-in-distress calls, with the cries of a distressed fawn being a personal favorite. A fawn represents more calories and is a likely candidate to be targeted by a pack of coyotes. After two series of distress calls and another 10-minute wait, I'll end the setup with another short series of howls. Since coyotes characteristically approach howls at a slower pace, be sure to wait at least 30 to 45 minutes per setup. I once called in nine coyotes on one subzero setup, so having a partner back you up isn't a bad idea.

If you want to bolster coyotes with additional confidence, include the chatter of magpies and conversing crows. These two birds have no qualms about being in the company of coyotes on frigid mornings. Any coyote, particularly young-of-the-year pups, know that sharp-eyed crows and scavenging magpies often have the inside scoop on the next easy meal. While using prey-in-distress calls, you can add fighting crow or yakking magpie sounds to make coyotes further drop their guard in the race to beat airborne scavengers to the gutpile.

You don't have to constantly come up with new distress imitations or to master new calls. The electronic call revolution has made it as easy as inserting a pair of AA batteries into a caller to broadcast the sounds of any prey imaginable. My favorite calling partner is the Johnny Stewart Preymaster digital caller. I start out with a digital howl and answer that with one of my own from a diaphragm call. Then, after waiting a few minutes, I punch the button to broadcast the screams of a fawn in distress. This has proven to be a hot combo that seduces coyotes to trot in for a last meal. **ah**

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