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THE SPORT HUNTING OF COYOTES^{1/}

by

Edward L. Kozicky^{2/}

In an effort to gain some insight into the sport hunting of coyotes in Kansas, Bob Henderson circulated 586 detailed questionnaires and received 228 replies--an excellent voluntary response.

Time does not permit detailed comments on each question and reply. We shall only hit the highlights, and add some editorial comment where it seems appropriate.

It should be remembered that those who took the time to answer the 35 questions were devotees of the sport. This point is emphasized by the fact that of the 225 hunters who responded, 95 have been hunting coyotes for 20 years or more. The next largest group was 52 hunters who had been hunting coyotes from one to five years. Of those hunting 20 years or more, 58 hunters believed that there are more coyotes than 20 years ago and only 5 believed that there were fewer.

Of the 225 total hunters, 223 last year spent an average of 34.8 days hunting coyotes--which seems to indicate a high level of enthusiasm.

Still-hunting with artificial calls led the list as the favorite coyote hunting method. Flushing coyotes ranked second, and this was followed with the use of sight hounds and trail hounds in that order.

The rifle was the most popular firearm with the shotgun and handgun ranking second and third, respectively. It is clear that calling coyotes and hunting with a rifle top the list in the sport of hunting coyotes. Of 111 hunters, 83 were of the opinion that interest in coyote hunting was increasing, whereas 24 thought it was about the same.

Two hundred and seven hunters spent more than \$111,000 last year hunting coyotes or an average of \$538 per hunter. Let's hope such information is kept confidential and never revealed to our wives.

The next part of the questionnaire related to the livestock industry, whose losses to coyotes were greatest with sheep, followed by cattle, hogs and poultry. One hundred and forty-three hunters helped a combined total of 675 livestock producers last year, and 133 hunters killed 1,227 coyotes that were causing damage. Of the 72 hunters who responded to all questions, 38 stated that they completely stopped the losses and 27 indicated that they reduced the losses.

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The 205 hunters who were active last year and reported their hunting success took a combined total of 6,202 coyotes for an average of 30.2 per hunter. Probably the average kill for all coyote hunters is considerably less. Of the 6,202 coyotes killed, 2,686 were sold for their pelts. Since coyote pelts are now in the \$30 range, I suspect a greater percentage of pelts will be sold this year.

Asked whether the coyote should be placed on the state list of game animals, 159 said "no" and 53 said "yes". Perhaps a fuller explanation of this question would have brought a more positive response. Game status would not mean curtailment of sport hunting for coyotes--in fact, it would help insure the sport hunting of coyotes.

The use of low-flying airplanes to shoot coyotes causing livestock losses was voted down 196 to 22, with 10 giving no response. The use of poisons was voted down by 214 with only 8 responding in the affirmative. However, the use of cyanide guns under strict regulations and a permit system to kill individual coyotes that kill livestock met with greater favor; 54 were in favor of such a program and 166 were opposed. There was no feeling that coyotes were killing more livestock at present than they were 20 years ago.

Details on coyotes and coyote hunting were interesting. One question was whether the hunters felt they killed about the same number of coyotes every fall regardless of how hard they hunted--168 said "yes" to that, and only 52 said "no".

The subject of hybrid coyotes (dog-coyote crosses) revealed that 72 hunters killed 1,520 hybrids in the last 10 years. However, hunters felt that there was no annual increase in the number of hybrids.

The largest coyote ever killed by a reporting hunter was said to have weighed 73 pounds and the average of 106 coyotes that were weighed was 43.5 pounds. There was an increase in the average weight of the coyote killed from fall through winter--the range being 37 to 52 pounds.

The largest hybrid coyote-dog cross was recorded at 84 pounds, and the average of 40 hybrids was 50 pounds.

According to the survey, most hunting groups are small, ranging from one to five persons with two hunters being the most typical group size. This reflects the popularity of calling coyotes over other forms of hunting and reminds me of the old adage, which is applicable to calling coyotes, that "two is company, but three is a crowd".

The hunters rated their reception from landowners as follows: 152 landowners were receptive and helpful, 73 didn't care, 35 allowed coyote hunting only, 14 allowed no hunting, and 17 (less than 6 percent) disliked coyote hunting.

Two hundred and seven of the hunters believed that the coyote was valuable to mankind. It was also obvious that hunters did not expect to collect a fee for killing a troublesome coyote to a landowner. Further, the hunters indicated that they have time to hunt coyotes that were killing livestock any

time of the year, and expressed willingness to travel 50 to 100 miles to help a livestock producer in coyote control.

Most of the hunters were convinced that livestock management was related to livestock losses from coyotes.

An overwhelming number (210 out of 219) approved of the card-carrying coyote hunter program. Hence, we owe Bob Henderson a vote of thanks for initiating the program. At the same time, we should consider what can be done to make a good program even better--which leads us into some of the suggestions by the respondents to the questionnaire.

One of the suggestions was to encourage the card-carrying coyote hunters to be responsible hunters. We hope that all of them are. At least, they signed a pledge to hunt in an ethical manner. Card-carrying coyote hunters should even be more aware than other hunters of the importance of seeking permission to hunt, respecting both the landowner and the land upon which he is hunting. After all, sport hunting is a privilege not a right. Another suggestion was to provide livestock producers with a list of card-carrying coyote hunters in their area. The program does need more publicity among landowners and conservation officers.

There was little support for night hunting. The main problems are identification of the eyes of an animal and the uncertainty of the background for the rifle bullet or the shotgun pellets. In addition, it is easy for a coyote to answer a call and leave without ever being seen at night.

If we can interpret the response to the questionnaire in terms of sport hunting, it strongly indicates that calling coyotes and shooting them with a rifle in the daylight hours is a challenging and productive sport to those with the patience and persistence to master it. In contrast to other forms of hunting, livestock producers are more likely to permit coyote hunting. Further, there are many instances where the sport hunting of coyotes has helped the livestock producer, and the livestock producer needs to know that the card-carrying coyote hunter stands ready throughout the year to help him without charge with troublesome coyotes.

I feel that calling coyotes with a mouth caller and shooting them with a rifle during daylight is the essence of sport hunting. To me, one of the great thrills in outdoor America is watching a coyote respond to a call. I have chosen a 30-06 rifle with a 125 grain bullet so that I either anchor the coyote or miss him, knowing that this bullet will fragment upon impact within 200 yards. I like daylight hours to enjoy the great outdoors scene in Kansas, the chance to watch the coyote respond to the call, and the chance to work with a fine rifle in rifle country. With a mouth caller I can hunt in my own way and change my style of calling if I choose. No two mouth calls sound the same--and although my calling technique might be improved, it's my own, for better or worse, and I much prefer it to a recorded call.

I would like to add two cardinal rules to hunting coyotes with a rifle. The first is to never shoot at a coyote on the skyline. To a large extent skylining by a coyote can be avoided by where the caller sets up to call. The other rule is to be sure that the bullet impacts in a safe area beyond the coyote in case you miss him.

Sport hunting of coyotes is probably only really understood by those who have spent hours and days pursuing one of the most wily animals in North America. Contrary to the ads in sporting magazines, calling coyotes takes patience, persistence, and faith in your calling. It would be good to know why coyotes do or do not respond on a given day to a caller, but that may fall into the same category as why fish do or don't bite on a given day. In the final analysis, like fishing, the best time to go coyote hunting is when you have a chance.

The sport hunting of coyotes is good wildlife conservation--the wise use of a natural resource. However, it can hardly be termed as an efficient control method for all situations. The use of steel traps should be the first line of defense against troublesome coyotes, but there will be situations that require more stringent control methods, such as cyanide guns or other poisons.

When we have competent people administering our state coyote control programs, such as Bob Henderson in Kansas, we should permit them to use the most efficient tools available to alleviate a coyote depredation problem. If we are going to make a state agency responsible for the management of the coyotes, we must give them the authority to do what must be done in a given situation.

We as sport hunters must respond to the reasonable needs of the livestock producers or they will take matters in their own hands in spite of the law of the land. I seriously doubt that any jury of a rancher's peers will convict him for the illegal use of poisons to protect his livestock, especially against the coyote.

Even though I find it tempting to continue to emit words of wisdom on the sport hunting of coyotes, I am reminded of a coyote hunting incident in Kansas about a year ago. Under seemingly perfect wind and weather conditions, I had about five fruitless set-ups in an attempt to call coyotes. The light was fading fast, and I announced to the accompanying landowner that there must not be any coyotes in the vicinity. No sooner had the words fallen from my lips than my ears were struck by a beautiful chorus of three separate "song dogs" announcing the end of my day and the beginning of theirs. My ego was shattered, but it reminded me that man was given two ears and only one mouth. Hence, one should spend twice as much time listening as he does talking. Thanks for listening.

1973 COYOTE HUNTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer all questions. Last year refers to the time period of July 1, 1972 through June 30, 1973.

1. How many years have you hunted coyotes? _____
2. If you have hunted coyotes 20 years or more, please underline the answer you feel is correct: There are (more) (less) (about the same) number of coyotes now as there were 20 years ago.
3. How many days did you spend coyote hunting last year? _____
4. How many miles did you drive while you were coyote hunting last year? _____
5. What method or methods do you use to hunt coyotes? (Check appropriate items)

_____ Sight Hounds	_____ Trapping
_____ Trail Hounds	_____ Tracking
_____ Calling	_____ Flushing with vehicle
6. What type of weapon(s) do you use?

_____ Shotgun	_____ Bow
_____ Rifle	_____ None
_____ Handgun	
7. Please estimate how much money you spent hunting coyotes last year? Include in this total estimate, conservative figures only on travel, dog food, meals, depreciation on equipment, gasoline, and ammunition.
\$ _____
8. How many livestock producers did you help last year who had coyote problems?
9. How many of these problem coyotes did you kill? _____
10. What was the livestock producers loss in the six months prior to the time you helped him? _____
11. What has it been in the months since you helped him? _____
12. Do you believe the interest in hunting coyotes is (increasing) (decreasing)?
13. How many coyotes did you kill during 1972-73? _____
14. How many of these coyotes did you sell? _____
15. Would you like to have the coyote placed on the list of game animals in Kansas? Yes _____ No _____

16. Are you in favor of:
- A. Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission issuing permits for the purpose of using airplanes for spotting coyotes as an aid in hunting coyotes? Yes_____ No_____
 - B. Using low-flying airplanes from which to shoot coyotes in controlling livestock losses due to coyotes? Yes_____ No_____
 - C. Using poisons in controlling coyote numbers? Yes_____ No_____
 - D. Using cyanide guns under strict regulations and a permit system to kill individual coyotes that kill livestock? Yes_____ No_____
17. Do you feel coyotes are killing more livestock now than they did 20 years ago? Yes_____ No_____
18. Do you feel there are about the same number of coyotes every fall regardless of how hard you hunt them? Yes_____ No_____
19. How many coyote-dog hybrids have you killed in the last 10 years? _____
5 years? _____
20. Do you believe there are more hybrids each year? Yes_____ No_____
21. What is the largest coyote you have killed and weighed on an accurate scale? _____lbs.
22. What time of the year was it killed? _____
23. What is the largest coyote-dog cross you have killed and weighed on an accurate scale? _____lbs.
24. When and where was it killed? _____
25. How many people hunt with you or are directly involved in coyote hunting with you? _____
26. How would you describe the general reception to you and coyote hunting by landowners in your area?
- A. Receptive and helpful.
 - B. Don't care.
 - C. Allow coyote hunting but no other hunting.
 - D. Allow no hunting or trespassing period.
 - E. Dislike coyote hunting.
27. Do you think the coyote is any value to mankind? Yes_____ No_____
28. Do you think it is alright for a coyote hunter to charge a fee when the hunter kills a coyote that has been killing livestock if it is agreeable with the producer? Yes_____ No_____

29. Do you have time to hunt for coyotes that are killing livestock between the months of April and October? Yes _____ No _____
30. How far from home would you travel to help a livestock producer with a coyote problem?
 _____ Less than 25 miles _____ Less than 50 miles _____ 100 miles or more
31. Do you know of anyone who has a tame bobcat? Yes _____ No _____
 If so, Who _____ Address _____
32. Do you think livestock management has anything to do with coyotes killing livestock? Yes _____ No _____
33. Do you think there are big cats (cougars, mountain lions, panthers, pumas) living in Kansas in the wild? Yes _____ No _____
34. Do you approve of the card-carrying coyote hunter program? Yes _____ No _____
35. What can we do to improve the program? If you have any ideas, please write them here.

We would appreciate having your name and address. However, it is not mandatory that you sign this. It is more important to us that you return the questionnaire whether or not you sign it. No postage stamp is necessary. Just put it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Thank you.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ County _____