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PHOTOGRAPHING COYOTES

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Abstract. Wildlife photography has become an increasingly popular hobby over the last 10 years. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are among the more difficult animals to photograph under natural field conditions (i.e., in the "wild"). For studying and photographing coyotes behaving routinely, I recommend the use of a "draw station" (i.e., cow carcass) and a blind that will allow relatively close inspection of coyote interactions.

Photography has been an effective medium of communication for over a century. Perhaps the earliest and most poignant example are the works of photographers during the Civil War. Dedicated in their intent to preserve the images of this brutal struggle, these men braved the hardships of the bloody campaigns to offer the 20th century and beyond a glimpse into this sad saga in American history. Since that time, the camera has brought to public's attention the progression of world events through the illustrated pages of books and periodicals.

Until early in the 20th century, serious photography was restricted to those professionals whose dedication and means allowed them to overcome the difficulties of the medium. Heavy cameras and lenses, slow film and complex chemicals effectively isolated almost all of the general public from engaging in the expression of photography.

With the introduction of compact small format cameras and a variety of film types, photography finally became an almost essential element in all facets of society by the late 20th century. As an educational tool, or simply documenting the progression of family life, the camera has evolved as a key element in the mainstream of education, business, and the private sector.

During the past 2 decades, the visual sophistication and demands of the North American, if not world readership, has increased progressively. Photography has become essential in illustrating the written word for both popular and scientific publications. As a result, publishers of almost all periodicals are requiring superior quality and depth to the photo coverage to serve the interests of the ever more demanding reader. Consequently, the need to

constantly improve our communication skills through photography is of importance, especially for those of us involved in field of publishing and education.

When documenting the natural history of the coyote photographically, it is essential to show the animal in as natural a state of existence as possible. Almost all published photos to date are of coyotes in controlled conditions or in public access areas where the creatures have largely lost their fear of humans. Accurate documentation of the coyote's ways is often altered dramatically when studied under such artificial conditions. Photographic techniques do exist which could minimize altered behavioral patterns when applied to field studies. Although time consuming and somewhat complex, these techniques have proven to be effective in documenting the natural lifestyle of wild coyotes in the Rolling Plains of Texas.

Three methods of field photography on the wild coyote which have proven effective are calling, still hunting, and natural blinds on draw stations.

Calling is perhaps the most popular method of viewing coyotes. Used by hunters dating back to perhaps to the pre-19th century, calling is a favorite method familiar to most hunters. It involves the use of a simple hand-held or electronic call that imitates the distress cries of a natural prey species. The coyote, as well as a variety of other creatures, responds to the sound and approaches to within a very short distance of the caller. When well concealed, photographers can often get dynamic close-ups of animals in this manner. The negative side of calling is that most of the photos are basically 1-dimensional in that very little action and interaction between other coyotes is possible.

Still hunting with a camera is a good method in which to attain photos of coyotes unaware of human presence. Although an excellent way to find coyotes behaving in a natural manner, the still approach is time consuming, as it is extremely difficult to approach coyotes to within a close distance.

The use of natural blinds on "draw stations" has proven to be the best method for me in attaining photos showing various types of coyote behavior without expending excessive time and energy covering large tracts of land. Site selection for the blind depends upon prevailing winds, light angles, and coyote abundance. Available terrain and vegetation around the photo site should be conducive to clear viewing of coyote interaction.

Draw stations can be baited with the carcass of any domestic animal of heavy weight. I preferments beef or horse weighing in excess of 300 pounds. Even then, the baits should be staked down to minimize the chances of several coyotes dragging the carcass away from the site

Photographing wild coyotes requires long telephoto lenses that allow photographs under low light conditions. Cost is sometimes prohibitive, but with high quality editorial demands at an all time high, low speed lenses will usually not meet the demanding requirements encountered under normal field conditions.