

# Outdoors

## You never know about bobcats

For me, the end of deer season always signals the beginning of predator-calling season. January and February are the lean months, when victuals are scarce for all Nature’s critters. That makes the squeal of a wretched rabbit (or a reasonably good facsimile thereof) attractive to the meat-eaters.

Coyotes being scarce hereabouts, the bobcat is our most callable large predator ... larger than a fox or ’coon, that is. It’s true that bobcat populations are typically smaller than those of coyotes, but cats are usually much more plentiful than most people realize. A ranch manager in Dimmit County once assured me that his place had few bobcats because he “kept them all shot out.” On that property over the next two nights, in about eight hours’ hunting, I called up no fewer than 10 bobcats!

Bobcats provide some real thrills for the varmint caller, but they’re unpredictable. They sometimes do unexpected things or fail to do what they’re supposed to do.

For example, everybody knows that cats come to the call very slowly, rarely leaving cover. So what do you think when your headlight picks up a pair of eyes running down a ranch road toward you so fast you know it can’t be a cat. The eyes don’t slow down, so you scramble to hit the shooting light before you get run over – and there stands a big bobcat, blinking at you from about 10 feet?

Another trick that bobcats play on callers who’re more experienced with coyotes – and therefore in the habit of setting up for anticipated shots upwind – is to boldly go where no coyote in his right mind would go, approaching from straight downwind! We know that none of the cat family possesses a great sense of smell, but it’s hard to believe a bobcat’s olfactory abilities are that bad. Their eyes and ears, however, make up for that deficiency.

Cats frequently respond to a call up to a point, that far and no farther. Then they just sit down and wait to see what happens. What usually happens is that hunters run out of patience and get up and leave, never having noticed the cat lying in the weeds about 50 yards out.

As a tip from an old bobcat man, these hung-up cats will sometimes jump up and come a-runnin’ if a



Photos by John Wootters

**This leopard-spotted bobcat sports the most beautiful pelt of all the cats Wootters has called up over the years. It came to the call in Val Verde County and might still live there, since the author’s policy is never to harm any critter that gives him such a great photographic opportunity.**

### Currently Outdoors



John Wootters

second call is added to the first. That’s why I always carry a mouth call even when I’m hunting with an electronic caller.

Something I learned when I did most of my varmint-calling during day-time for photography is that cats are fascinated by soft repetitive clicking noises – such as those made by a camera with a motor drive. I’ve often seen a cat approach a recorded call broadcast from a remote speaker – and then walk right past the speaker on its way to my camera. Since I first noted this phenomenon, I’ve called up several cats from short range by tapping a couple of cartridges or even two pebbles together. House cats aren’t the only ones that curiosity killed.

The trick to calling cats at night is to hunt during the dark of the moon and get into pre-selected positions quietly, and then stay there, calling continuously, for not less than 45 minutes. Longer is better.

In daytime, all the same applies except that you must take pains to conceal yourself from the cats’ eyes. Full camouflage, including face and hands, is a must.

Obviously, a cat has to be close enough to hear

your call. Tracks are the most easily found sign of bobcat presence. Cats prefer to walk on well-used game trails or on ranch roads, where tracks are generally easy to notice. Bobcats, like housecats, habitually cover their feces, raking soil and debris toward the deposit, in contrast to coyotes, which kick dirt away from the stool. Like tracks, these signs appear often on dirt roads.

For calling at random, pick stands near rocky ledges and outcrops or dense thickets along water-courses, where a bobcat can approach through a little thin cover. Don’t leave too soon – and, for goodness sakes, look behind you now and then.

**John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen’s Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column “Buck Sense” and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, “Hunting Trophy Deer.” He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen’s Hunting magazines.**



These are tracks of a large female bobcat in Webb County. Like most quadrupeds, bobcats’ front feet are larger than the rear ones, so the front paw print is bigger and more elongated than the rounder rear print. These cat tracks are easily differentiated from coyote and dog prints by the rounder shape, the equal-sized toe prints, and the absence of claw marks.