

# Hunting the caracal

Ethical ways to make it easier for you to remove these cats from the area where they're killing your sheep.



## BY GARY LAUBSCHER

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As noted before, hunting the caracal is different to hunting the jackal in many ways. For one, cats come in low and mostly slow, blink very slowly and will often vanish, to reappear in another area. Here are some other basics you need to get right:

- **Cover.** Call near cover like koppies, dry waterbeds and places where cats travel; avoid dead ground they can hide in when coming in to your call. Only hunt on moonless nights. (There's an exception to this, which I'll discuss in due course.)

- **Weather.** Before a cold front is a good time. Make use of easterly winds like a southeaster. Cats travel a lot in wind (99% of my cat kills have been in wind). The caracal can't smell and wind a human, so watch all approach angles.

- **Camouflage.** Cover your bakkie totally. Use colours that match your surroundings. Never use black covers, as these stand out as 'solid blocks' in the dark. Also, never use shade cloth, as this squeaks and 'shines'. Make sure nothing moves, because cats spot movement very easily.

Position your bakkie so that the rear faces the side from which you expect the cat to approach. This creates a smaller 'target' if the caracal looks in your direction than the vehicle seen from the side.

- **Time.** Allow for at least an hour's calling, preferably more, to get a cat to come in. Be patient.

- **Use a dimmer.** The moment you spot eyes, dim the light so only the eye reflection shows. If the cat blinks fast, that's a sure sign your light is too bright. When the caracal is close, increase the light's intensity to shoot.

- **Sounds.** You can use an electronic caller (on 'jackrabbit distress') or a squeaky sound from a child's bath toy. But I find a hand caller is best. Electronic callers can't compete with it. If you do use an electronic caller, don't place it away from you, as you want the eyes to look in your direction often so you can see and identify the cat.

- **Night vision.** This is by far the best to use when calling cats. The less light you use, the better; the cats come in faster and closer if you use night vision (NV).

Now, if the moon is up and too bright for you to hunt, but a cat killed a sheep

the previous night and an easterly wind is blowing, you have a very good chance of seeing the cat, because the caracal returns to a killed sheep the next night 99% of the time.

It normally returns to a previous kill within an hour after dark. Most times, after killing a sheep, a cat will move no more than about 500m away. The next night it will be back at the sheep within an hour, as it covers 100m every 10 minutes (cats cover ground slowly).

## IN FRONT OF YOU

Get to the site at least an hour before dusk. Note the position of the dead sheep and look for cat tracks. If the ground is too hard, look for the best spot the cat is likely to have come from.

Position yourself in such a way the cat will have to pass in front of you to get to the dead sheep. This is vital for success. The cat *must* pass across your ambush position!

## AIM FOR THE CENTRE MASS AS IT OFFERS A LARGER TARGET AREA

I sit 85m away and try not to use the bakkie. Instead, I sit on a swivel chair, creating a small 'obstacle'.

Wait until nightfall, scanning with NV when you can no longer see with normal binoculars. Ensure you don't make a noise while waiting – and pray the caracal doesn't return until it's pitch-dark, or it will see you first and you won't know it was back.

## BEST WAY

If you spot the eyes coming back, always put the night vision infrared light on in front of the cat, not directly on it. Slowly put down the night vision binoculars and switch on the rifle NV scope, then slowly bring the light back towards that cat.

Follow it in with the scope. Watch its body language for signs of nervousness. When the cat is about 10m away from the sheep, make a soft kissing noise with your lips to stop it – and fire.

I aim for the centre mass as it offers a larger target area. This is the most ethical, target-specific method you can use. ■ FW