

Ethical, knowledgeable predator control

In the first article of this new series, the author explains that effective and ethical predator control starts with learning the subtle habits of the various predator species.



BY GARY LAUBSCHER

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Predators cause major problems for stock farmers in many areas, and control is therefore crucial. However, it is vitally important to Southern Africa's wildlife heritage that this control be ethical and target-specific.

This series aims to teach ethical skills for predation control, as an alternative to producers relying on the use of poison, gin traps and other cruel, and often ineffective, methods.

WHY VARIED CONTROL METHODS ARE NECESSARY

Predators are often cunning, elusive and smart, and it is a real challenge to beat a predator in its own environment. They mostly approach a call sound at night out of curiosity rather than actual hunger, and you never know what a night hunt is going to deliver. Thus, variation is the key when targeting predators. It is essential to keep them guessing rather than 'educating' them, otherwise you will end up with more problems than you had before.

When it comes to predator control, there are no strict rules; expect the unexpected, and remember that what works today may not work tomorrow.

THE MORE TIME YOU SPEND IN THE BUSH, THE MORE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF PREDATOR HABITS YOU WILL GAIN

It is also crucial that you target the correct animals, and leave the 'innocent' ones. This can only be achieved by using the calling method.

As such, never use poison or gin traps. The majority of those landowners who set such devices don't know how to place them safely, and innocuous species fall victim most of the time.

PREDATORS ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

A hunter should be able to distinguish between the various predators, and know how to control the hunt effectively.

For example, when hunting jackal, it is best to call during the crescent or quarter moon. The jackal is an intelligent pack

animal; responds to the realistic sounds of other jackals; has a good sense of smell; and tends to lie down when the wind blows.

The caracal, on the other hand, is almost the opposite, and is not as intelligent as the jackal.

It is best to call caracal in when there is no moon and it's pitch dark. The caracal is not a pack animal, and does not respond to the real sounds of other cats unless the sound is very nearby. It has superb eyesight and picks up movement quickly, but is unlikely to become aware of humans.

The caracal is also active when the wind is blowing, unlike the jackal.

You are more likely to successfully call in caracal with a hand-caller, than with an electronic caller.

This is because the hand-call sound technique is unique, and no two people blowing a caller sound the same.

The use of a hand-caller as opposed to an electronic caller may also explain why some hunters are successful, and others not.

While some animals, such as the jackal, are not active when the wind is blowing, my records over the past 27 years indicate that on virtually all occasions when I succeeded in calling in cats, the conditions were windy.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

To be successful, it is crucial to do your homework thoroughly beforehand. Part of this will involve speaking to local farmworkers who will invariably be able to supply you with important information on tracks, kills and sightings, amongst others.

A final thought: there is no substitute for practical experience. Most of the knowledge and skills you gain will come from time spent in the bush, not from reading. No amount of theory, however sound, can take the place of practical experience. Having said this, good, sound advice will steer you in the right direction, and teach you the basics. I hope to do that in this series of articles. ■ **FW**

