

Calling the Eastern Bobcat

Many in New England regard the Bobcat as one of the most prized of all our Predators. Even though his numbers are healthy and still growing, it is rare to see one of these reclusive, very well camouflaged cats. He is not nearly so rare as many New Englanders believe, and with the correct approach, responds to the call very well indeed. A more beautiful animal is truly hard to find.

The first step to calling them is scouting. I am a bowhunter, and spend many hours on stand in good cat country. I note all bobcats I see, and document all prints and scat I find. The bobcats can then be called near these areas easily later on, and because of their smaller home range, most probably will be lured to a predator call. If you see a bobcat, just hunt that spot time and again until he is home. Bobcats are not easily made call-shy. Just keep calling in and around where you have spotted him, and you will succeed. To call an area ten times a year for one cat is reasonable. Probably not a good idea for coyotes, but we are talking cats now!

The big difference in calling bobcats I have from the mainstream calling community is sounds. Bobcats in New England are big and bold!! I think they are looking for a big meal. People don't realize bobcats love small deer and fawns in the spring. When most fellas talk bobcats they usually agree on bird sounds. While I have called quite a few cats with high pitched bird in distress sounds, I have had more consistent luck here in New England with rabbit in distress sounds. Jackrabbit, cottontail, fawn in distress, heck, shot my biggest bobcat ever to a pup in distress call. He came charging in, very un-catlike!! Also, if you are a coyote hunter, and like to howl, just do so. Many bobcats have arrived on the scene after a good amount of howling. Bobcats live in and among coyotes, and pay them little mind!!!!

In general he will not respond to calling in exactly the same fashion as a coyote. He will usually respond quickly, then stop short and survey the area as he slowly stalks in. He may just sit down and watch from a distance, as I've seen him do many times. It is hard to see the cat arrive, as he is so well camoed up. In my state Bobcat Season does not open until December 20th, and the snow that usually blankets the ground is an enormous help spying him coming in. If you do not catch his initial arrival, keep an eye out for slow movement, and watch out for that tail. Many times I've seen it twitching before I saw the whole cat. Many callers on occasion (including myself) have just suddenly seen the Bobcat standing (or sitting) there, with no idea how he snuck in undetected. One sure telltale that he has arrived is the bird activity. Many years ago I saw a big bobcat trotting up a field edge with many magpies in tow, diving and screeching at him. If you see any odd bird activity, scan that area closely.

I don't fancy a bobcat very intelligent at all, and rank him below a red fox, and most definitely not as cunning as a coyote. He is actually pretty easy to call and harvest, as he lacks the ability to use our human smell in his defense. They say his sense of smell is acute, but my personal opinion is that he cannot make the mental leap between our smell and danger.

To be approached by a bobcat completely downwind is not uncommon. Also when night hunting, the cats are the least affected by light. Also upon a missed shot or perceived danger he will just freeze and stand there, I'm sure, confident his camo will protect him.

I just saw this behavior no more than a month ago, as I was calling a large cut hayfield at daylight. I started my calling series with a Jackrabbit distress call on my FOXPRO, and within a few minutes I saw an animal running toward me on an old tractor road. I put my gun up to scope him out, and it was a bobcat. Bobcat season had not started yet, so I was able to just enjoy watching him. When he hit the field, he put a stalk on my decoy, just as I saw two more animals appear on the same tractor road. Surely this must be my coyotes! Nope, two more bobcats. I started the FOXPRO softly, and glanced to my right just in time to see a very large coyote trotting up the middle of the field. I looked at the big cat, and he had sat down upon the coyotes arrival.

When the coyote was well in range I took the shot, and the dog fell. I glanced over at the bobcat, and he was still sitting there watching. The second two were milling around the field edge just inside the woods. Out of curiosity, I hit the caller again, and the bobcat squatted down, but did not stalk. I looked over again, and saw a second coyote way out, maybe 200 yards, and decided to take him. At the sound of my shot the coyote spun a couple of times, did a fifty yard dash and expired. This commotion was finally enough to un-nerve these cats, and they were gone. This little tale is not to brag on my hunting skill, so much as to illustrate fairly typical cat behavior in New England.

The e-caller has made things a little easier, as when I target bobcats only, I call a lot more often than when I hunt coyotes. I can turn my FOXPRO on for a minute, off a minute, on, etc. without getting all worn out calling all day. When you are making four or five hour long stands, it makes a big difference. A decoy really helps with the cats also, as they really like to put on a stalk. A remote control decoy like the Jack in the Box is a real boon to the Bobcat man. I think the remote decoy is one of the best ideas for bobcat hunting to come down the pike in awhile.

So try some bobcat hunting today. Call a little more often, stay on stand longer, and watch for those subtle movements. Yes, the bobcat is easy to collect, but please, once you get good don't over harvest. When I was younger, I shot a lot of spots out that are just now starting to recover. Take a couple of bobcat pelts a year, and get back after those coyotes! You'll never shoot them out.