

Savage Predator Hunter

By John Haviland



The Savage Predator Hunter rifle with a Zeiss 3-9x scope and Zeiss 10x42 binocular were field tested on New Mexico coyotes.

Gary Roberson, of Burnham Brothers Game Calls, has spent a lot of time over the years waiting for various predators to respond to his calls of a tormented rabbit. During that time he thought about what features would make a rifle perfect for hunting predators. The more Roberson thought about it, the more convinced he became that predator hunters needed such a specific rifle and took his ideas to Ron Coburn, the president of Savage Arms. Coburn liked the idea and ran with it and within six months the Savage Model 10 Predator Hunter rifle was a reality.

What better way to see if Roberson's ideas would shake out than to take the new Predator Hunter rifle predator hunting? Last January Roberson and Coburn put together a coyote hunt near Tucumcari, New Mexico.

Along on the hunt was Tony Tekansik of Zeiss Sport Optics, gun writer M.L. (Mic) McPherson, and calling expert Larry Symes. I was along to report on the new rifle, but mostly because I just love the smile a coyote wears when it comes to the call and that momentary look of shock when it discovers it has been deceived.

The Predator Hunter is chambered in 204 Ruger and 223 and 22-250 Remington and is based on Savage's short-action Model 110. The rifle has three noticeable features: 1) The Accu-Trigger adjusts from 1.5 to 6 pounds of pull by altering the tension on a spring beneath the tang. The trigger was set at 1.5 pounds on the rifle I used and the trigger broke at exactly that weight when I tested it five times with a gauge. 2) The oversized bolt handle knob fills the palm of the hand



Gary Roberson (right) and Ron Coburn look over the first coyotes taken with the Savage Predator Hunter rifle.

for sure purchase while rapidly working the bolt. 3) The rifle, except for the bolt body, trigger assembly, and bolt release, is covered with Mossy Oak's Brush pattern camouflage, as was the Zeiss 3-9x40mm Conquest scope on the rifle. The Zeiss scope probably will be offered on Predator Hunter Package guns so the camo pattern matches on the scope and rifle.

Nearly a foot of snow covered the country the first morning of the hunt. Ron Coburn, Gary Roberson, and I trudged through the snow to a low ridge overlooking a narrow valley running down from a mesa to the north. Roberson set one of his Compucaller II digital electronic calls and a turkey feather suspended from a rod 30 yards upwind. The turkey feather twisting in the breeze shows any change in wind direction and,



Mic McPherson is shown here with a couple of the coyotes he took with the Savage Predator Hunter rifle.

more important, adds some movement for coyotes to zero in on when coming to the call.

Roberson punched a button on the remote control to key up the wails of a cottontail rabbit in distress when we were snug in our hiding spots in the shadows of cedar trees. The sun rose in a clear sky and a bright light shined across the ground. A coyote coming to the call should have been easy to see. But I failed to see the first coyote until Coburn shot from my right. He saw the coyote come out of a patch of cedars to the north and slink through the tall grass and around the drooping branches of cholla. The coyote disappeared for a few minutes, then reappeared up close and moving to get downwind of the call. Coburn shot quickly and the first coyote fell to the Savage Predator Hunter.

At the next setup another coyote approached from Coburn's side.

He lined up his rifle on it, but, being polite, held his fire and let it pass on toward me. The coyote blended into the tan grass and was difficult to keep in sight, even at 80 yards. When it stepped clear of a cedar I found it in the scope against the snow and snapped off a shot. The little bullet hit it hard and it twirled around for a moment, snapping at the bullet wound.

The rifle certainly came to bear quickly, and that was something Roberson wanted in a rifle for calling predators. But what exact features went into the Predator Hunter to make it so? One is the rifle's three-position safety on top of the tang. The safety tab pulled all the way to the rear engages the safety and locks the bolt shut. The tab set in the middle position keeps the safety on, but allows opening the bolt. The tab pushed all the way forward allows the rifle to fire. The safety moves easily and without any "clicks" and to



Gary Roberson is packing back the first coyote shot with Savage's new Predator Hunter rifle.

use it requires no conscious thought. The rifle's barrel measures 1.05 inches in diameter just forward of the barrel nut and slims down over its 22-inch length to 0.74 inch at the muzzle. Savage calls that a medium-contour barrel and it provides a good weight and length to smoothly swing the rifle and keep it swinging on moving targets. A rubber butt pad on the rifle is $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick at the top and bottom and dishes out in the center to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. A slight forward angle on the top of the pad helps the pad slide to the shoulder and keeps the pad from catching on clothes when the rifle is mounted quickly. The rifle's hard synthetic stock is on the slim side with a rounded fore-end 1.8 inches in diameter across the middle of the checkering and 1.27 inches across the grip where the thumb and middle finger wrap around. The Savage Accu-

Trigger is the rifle's most important feature for a quick shot. The user can set it to the pull weight he or she prefers and it has no creep or overtravel to make you stutter and hesitate when pulling the trigger.

Coburn explained that while the Predator Hunter is aimed at hunters who call predators, the rifle also is good for a variety of shooting chores from shooting on a rest on a bench or in field positions while shooting prairie dogs, practicing at the range, semi-serious target shooting, and pleasurable plinking. "If we want to sell a rifle like this we have to make it appealing for a variety of hunting uses," Coburn said.

That afternoon I found out just how fast I could bring the Predator Hunter to bear. We set up in the red boulders of a hill overlooking a wide arroyo pocked with cedars. My rifle was propped on shooting sticks and pointed toward the front where a coyote should have come from. After awhile I started to nod off in the afternoon sun. From the corner of my half-closed eye came movement from back and to the left of me at the base of the hill. A coyote was on the run and within 15 feet of me with a smile on its face, thinking of a free lunch, before I could straighten up. In another bounce it would be right at my feet so there was nothing to do but try to get on it. What held me up was lifting the rifle up off the sticks and bringing it down toward the coyote. The coyote swapped ends at the movement and as it zigged through the rocks, the rifle sights zagged and the bullet smacked the ground just to the right of the coyote. The coyote hadn't made another 20 yards by the time I had worked the bolt and was on it again with a fresh cartridge. I swung the rifle hard, but it wasn't enough and when I pulled



Tony Tekansik, with Zeiss, is shown here with his Predator Hunter rifle at the ready while he scans the country with his Zeiss 10x42 binocular.

the trigger the bullet hit right at the end of its tail.

The next morning I went out with Tony Tekansik and Larry Symes and nearly the same thing happened. As we walked in to call overlooking a brushy creek bottom, I noticed tiny prints of a fox in the snow. Symes placed the call out in front and I took a seat downwind against a cedar. After ten minutes nothing had come to the call so I started using my Zeiss Victory F-L 10x42 binocular to search the ground a couple of hundred yards out for a coyote that might be sitting and watching. After another five minutes I started glassing the south-facing slope of a mesa, hoping to maybe spot a mule deer. It was almost like I was flying while using the Zeiss binocular to focus on distant objects and scan the country.

As I lowered the binocular some-

thing moved at the edge of my eye. A gray fox tiptoed along the edge of the brush and stopped 20 yards out. The rising sun highlighted the grizzled gray along its head and back and the contrasting fawn brown on its chest. The fox looked right at me, its ears pointing forward. It had me pegged. I got the fox in the scope for just a part of a second as it ran beneath the cedars. That was all right, though, because just the sight of the fox was more than enough.

As we went deeper into the country Tekansik explained that Zeiss had just started including its Rapid-Z Ballistic Reticles on its Conquest and Victory variable power scopes. The Rapid-Z reticles have hash marks on the lower portion of the vertical cross hair that are used as an aiming point to compensate for bullet drop at different distances and to correct for wind

drift. The Rapid-Z 600 is for standard hunting cartridges like the 270 Winchester, the 800 for cartridges like the Remington 300 Ultra Magnum, 1000 for the 308 Winchester in a tactical rifle, and the Varmint for fast-steppers like the 22-250 and 220 Swift.

The next setup overlooked a wide flat of grass that ran down to a bottom of cedars and red bank hills. There just had to be a coyote in those eroded breaks. After only a few minutes a coyote came out of the trees on a straight run for Tekan sik. The only problem was cows from all directions had seen us walk in and thought we were going to feed them and had nearly surrounded us. The coyote ran through the cows and Tekansik had to wait for a wide opening free of cows before he could shoot. At the shot the coyote swapped ends, but ran only a short way.

That was the only success we had that day. However, our other party of hunters was tearing it up. Mic McPherson had never called coyotes before. He shot two coyotes, one after another. Then two came running in together and he knocked one down and then the second as it turned tail to run. Mic humbly attributed the fast and accurate shooting to the Predator Hunter rifle.

The final day of the hunt I threw in with McPherson for his luck. At the first setup, a coyote came running to the Compucaller across a wide basin. It skidded to a stop right next to the call and McPherson plugged it. Roberson kept the caller going and two minutes later another coyote came in on the same path. It nearly tripped over the dead coyote. McPherson plugged that one, too. "You can shoot the next one," he promised.

We drove a mile up the road and then hiked toward the base of

a long mesa. A low ridge offered an overlook and we hunkered down in our camouflage against it. Brush was thick in front and to the sides. Roberson played the caller for 30 seconds. A raven sailed past, croaking in curiosity, then only silence. After a time the flashes of two coyotes came through the openings in the brush up the draw. The coyotes crisscrossed in their run to get to the call first. I tracked them through the scope until they came to the opening where the turkey feather waved in the breeze. I shot and one coyote rolled over. The second cut left back into the brush and I yanked open the rifle bolt and shoved it home. The dog was a couple of hundred yards out and running hard before it came into the open. I gave him my regards with a final shot and it cut left and really turned on the speed.

MORE FEATURES OF THE PREDATOR HUNTER

According to the Savage catalog, the Predator Hunter is based on the Savage Model 10 short bolt-action and weighs 7.25 pounds with its synthetic stock and 22-inch barrel. The twist rate for the rifles is 1:12" for the 204 Ruger, 1:7" for the .223, and 1:9" for the 22-250. As near as I could determine by marking a cleaning rod and pulling it through the bore, the twist of the 223 I used had a twist of 1:9".

The rifle's staggered box magazine holds five 223 cartridges. The magazine's blind bottom requires removing cartridges from the magazine by cycling them out of the magazine with the bolt, one at a time, and dropping them into the hand. A detachable magazine for the rifle is planned.

The rifle's hard composite stock has four cross ribs and one rib the length of the barrel channel, making the stock's fore-end very stiff. The sides of the grip and fore-end have

impressed checkering that provides a rough surface for a sure hold.

On a cold but calm January day I took the Predator Hunter, mounted with the Zeiss 3-9x scope, to the shooting range with a variety of factory loaded 223 cartridges. The following is what the rifle grouped with the various loads. Groups were fired one right after another.

LOAD AND

THREE SHOTS AT 100 YARDS

Winchester Supreme	
40-gr. BST	0.41"
Remington UMC	
45-gr. JHP	1.15"
Winchester USA	
45-gr. JHP	0.98"
Federal American Eagle	
50-gr. HP	0.62"
Winchester Supreme	
50-gr. BST	0.38"
Federal Premium	
55-gr. Sierra GameKing BTHP	1.25"
Winchester	
55-gr. FMJ	1.06"



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