

# The Hardcore

Member John Griswold



**Out of three coyotes that came in together to the call, these two were taken. From left: Randy Roede, South Dakota state trapper; Jeff Rheborg, CEO and Club President of Varmint Hunters Association; and author John Griswold.**



**This is the first coyote taken during the day that the author hunted with Jeff Rheborg.**

Jeff Rheborg e-mailed and asked me to write a story on our last couple of coyote hunts together.

I have lived in South Dakota all my life and grew up doing what a vast majority of South Dakotans do: hunt and fish. My dad called in my first coyote when I was 8 years old, and I have been hooked ever since. I shot that coyote the day after I received my first centerfire rifle, a Remington 788 .223, which currently sits in my safe waiting for a new barrel.

Anyway, the coyote bug got me at an early age and I have been pursuing the elusive song dog ever since. This article is not about the how-to, but I will briefly touch on my hunting style. I use only hand calls but currently am considering an electronic call, which I will expand on later. You will not find me in the field without binocular, laser rangefinder, and an accurate rifle.

Depending on the type of terrain I am hunting, I sometimes will have a spotting scope along for the ride.

The main thing I have learned from the years I have hunted coyotes is that all your coyote hunting bells and whistles are just tools and no one tool is going to be the magic wand that brings in Mr. Wile E. Spot and stalk, locate and call, and just plain ol' calling where it looks good are techniques I use on every hunt. Most of my coyote hunting is done by locating coyotes either by calling or glassing and hunting them in their core areas.

I compete at the V.H.A. 600-yard competition shoots that are held in the spring and summer months, and I also attend the annual V.H.A. Jamboree. While competing at these events for the last several years, I had the opportunity to become good friends with V.H.A. President Jeff Rheborg. Jeff and I share the passion for hunting coyotes.

Jeff and I have talked about getting together for a hunt on several different occasions, but finally we just decided to make it happen. In January 2009, we spent a half day calling in Jeff's area. One of the first things I picked up from Jeff is that he maintains a journal (calling log) on all his hunts, documenting information on each calling stand. I guess it just never occurred to me to do this but it is something that I am going to start doing.

It was a warm day with temperatures around 40 degrees and we were just coming out of a cold period (sub-zero temps for the lows on several days). Melting snow on top of frozen ground made for slick and mucky conditions. You definitely wanted to have on your waterproof clothes for this hunt. The events of the day went like this:

First stand: Jeff selected an area where he had located coyotes a couple of days before and we set up at the

head of a large draw that opened to the west. Ridgelines were all around us with rough country to the south of us. Keeping the pickup hidden from ridge running dogs made us walk a little over half a mile to the stand. We had determined that I would call the first stand, using hand calls. I called for around 15 minutes without success and went to the howler to try to surface a dog. Sat for another 10 minutes with no response, then moved on.

Second stand: Jeff tells a story on the walk in about calling in and harvesting a quad (four coyotes on the same stand) in this area. I look up and spot a 'yote eyeballing us from about 400 yards away. We watch as he slips over the hill seconds later. We separate about 30 yards apart and cover suspected travel routes to our location. It is Jeff's turn to call so he has the electronic caller set up. He goes through the life-like calling sequences and 10 minutes later one is paralleling past me at about 125 yards. I bark at him and he stops just long enough for the cross hairs to settle but not long enough for the sear to drop. Both Jeff and I continue to bark at him until I determine that he is going to continue trotting by me until he hits our wind. Boom! Dog down.

Jeff hits the distress sound and we stay on stand for another 10 minutes. Jeff and I had just finished a truck discussion on staying on stand after a "dog down" situation and continue to call. We both believe that many opportunities are lost because callers think the jig is up after the first shot is fired. Anyway, we stay for an additional 10 minutes and give each other the "nothing else coming" look. We walk over to check out the prize and I spot a 'yote working up a draw 300 yards out. Apparently he already spotted us as well because he hightailed it out of there. We muttered some things under our breath, picked up our dog, and moved on. If the truck discussion would have included staying 15 minutes instead of 10, I think we would have dragged two out of that stand, but who knows.

Third stand: My turn to blow the whistle and once again we spot a dog on the walk in. He saw us coming, and we watched as another one slipped out as

we set up. I immediately went through some coyote vocals on the howler and seconds later went to the distress. Jeff motions that he has one coming and three to four minutes later, occupied by mouse squeaks and distress, I still don't see the dog. Jeff says the coyote laid down so I find him through binocs and range him at 315 with about a 3 mph crosswind. All I can see is the coyote's head so I tell Jeff to try him. Jeff was using his .204 Ruger, which he reports to be unproven on coyotes, so he wanted to get a confirmed with it. At the shot, I see the coyote bite at his body and then over the hill he goes. A short tracking job later revealed that it was a center body hit and the .204 has a confirmed. After the shot we see two other dogs leaving the area about three-quarters of a mile away. If "ifs" and "buts" were candies and nuts, it would be Christmas every day. I'll take the one any day and seeing other dogs leave the area does not bother me a bit.

Fourth stand: Last stand of the day provided 20 minutes of watching a nice South Dakota sunset. We did have a low flying plane come over, but I can't see how that helped us much.

We were very happy with seeing seven coyotes on two stands and marked that area as a "need to come back again." It was my second experience being around an electronic caller and I can really see the benefits of having some of the options available. The caller had very good volume and would prove invaluable in windy conditions. The electronics definitely will say some things that I cannot reproduce with hand calls.

Before I left for home, Jeff and I discussed trying it again in a few days since the weather report predicted a cold front coming into the area. Five days later I called Jeff and we planned for the following day. Temperatures were topping out at 20 degrees and the next day showed winds of 10 mph.

We met the next day at sunup and Randy Rhoede was along for the trip as well. Randy is another hardcore coyote hunter who makes a living through his knowledge of wildlife, which specifically involves the coyote. Randy also utilizes an electronic caller as a tool to

work the song dogs. I was pleased to have him along. Anytime I can hunt with another caller I try to pay attention to his setup, which includes stand selection and calling technique, even if he is using an electronic caller. Every caller has sounds in his arsenal that have proven useful to him, and listening to Jeff and Randy use calls that day added a couple of sounds that I will be reproducing.

Again, we went to an area where Jeff had located dogs in the past and it helped that the rancher was reporting to Jeff that the dogs were around. Here is how the day transpired:

First stand: Very cold with temp hovering around zero. We select Jeff as the first to call so the electronics send the message off and on for 20 minutes. Nothing comes and nothing answers. We move on.

Second stand: We decide to chance a stand close to a gravel road and unexpected early morning traffic cut that one short. We move again.

Third stand: We set up with the sun shining over our backs and wind in our face. It is one of those places that when you sit down, you know the area should hold coyotes. Randy fires up the music and I catch movement shortly after the first series. I let Randy know that we have a pair hung up at around 700 yards. I check out the dogs through my scope as Randy tries to get them to commit. Through my scope, I see that we have three 'yotes eyeing our location. Randy sporadically tries some sounds and then he hits a chord that gets them heading toward our location. We see them committing for a hundred yards or so and then they go out of sight. If the dogs continue in our direction, they will appear on a rise about 180 yards away.

The first one comes into sight slightly to my right and is staring in our direction like he does not know if this deal is legit. I see movement to my left and find a second dog doing the same. I slightly move my gun toward the second dog and I wait for Randy to take the first one that appeared. My dog suddenly commits and is rapidly covering ground toward us. I hear Randy voice bark, and then nothing. Randy then tells me to take mine so I voice



**The author belly crawled to within 375 yards of this coyote and got it despite a strong crosswind.**

howl and mine stops at a buck fifty. Boom! Dog down. I hear Randy shoot and after I ensure that mine is down, I reposition my gun toward Randy's dog, which has completed a spin and is off to the races. My crosshairs settle as the 'yote is just about to go over the rise and out of sight. Boom! Another dog down.

Randy and I scan for the third dog but we never see it. Randy tells me that his dog was trotting off to the side and he could not get the dog to stop for a high percentage shot so he told me to take mine first. We both agreed that he got a hit on his dog but it obviously was not in the pump house. Unfortunately, Jeff was watching the back door on this stand so he only got to hear the play by play on the radio, but he stayed put like a good calling partner and let the events play out. We gather up our dogs and head to our next stand after a short photo session.

Fourth stand: We set up about three-quarters of a mile from a cow that had died several days prior. The rancher told Jeff about the cow and reported that the coyotes had already started working on it. I blow the hand calls but nothing surfaces. We move on.

Fifth stand: We move three-quar-

ters of a mile away from the cow in a different direction, believing the dogs are in the area. Electronics produce nothing, and we move on.

Sixth stand: We checked out the cow and see that dogs have started on it but Randy reports that only a couple of coyotes at most have been on the downed critter. We move three-quarters of a mile in another direction and try again ... with no success. We move on.

Seventh stand: We travel a few miles and set up. Twenty minutes go by with nothing showing, so we move on.

Eighth stand: OK, this is where it becomes easy to just pull the pin and call it a day, but not this group. We set up and 25 minutes later we are in the pickup going to another spot.

Ninth stand: On the way to this stand we see a coyote standing on the horizon. The dog sees us as well and heads out of the country like he saw the boogey man. The wind has picked up to 10 mph sustained and gusting to 15 mph. Jeff and Randy stay up high and I select a spot downwind and lower. I can barely hear the electronics that Randy is playing at high volume, but I know that Wile E. Coyote can hear better than

I can. Ten minutes in, Jeff reports that he heard one answer a long way off. Another 10 minutes with nothing and then Jeff says he has an irate mule deer doe paralleling him a couple of hundred yards out. Randy asks, "Is there a coyote in front of her?" and a short time later Jeff assures us that there is indeed a yipper getting his fill of the doe.

Ten minutes later we have this dog yelling his head off at us from 700 yards. Randy goes through the play list but Wile E. continues to sit and yell. Since I am out of sight from the dog, Randy tells me to move in and try for a shot. I slide into a draw and move to a ridge that will, I hope, reveal the dog that continues to tell us that things are not right in the world. I belly crawl up to the ridgeline and spot the dog sitting on his butt and yelling his head off. I range him at 375 and start estimating bullet drift. Jeff and Randy are on the radios laying odds on the shot and I tell you that I got pretty fired up before this shot. A few long breaths got my heart rate down and I tell myself that this is just like the other hundred times I've done it. I know I am going to be either the hero or zero at the drop of the sear. The dog stands and then sits, at which time I tell Randy to work some dog tunes to keep him standing for the 10 to 12 inches of bullet drift that I am guessing. Randy plays the music and Wile E. stands to yell. Boom! Third dog down.

Jeff and I go gather up the dog and we sure got hot and sweaty dragging that dog out of the breaks. Jeff tells me that he was watching the dog when it got knocked off its feet and he heard the gunshot a short time later. Jeff and Randy were still sitting in the same spot 700 yards away when the shot was fired.

We tried two other stands that day, with a dog surfacing on the last stand but he would not commit. The highest temp reading that day was 16 degrees so it was three red-faced hunters with three coyotes in the back of the pickup heading to town.

I enjoyed the company of Jeff and Randy and hope to blow the whistle with these guys again.

