

RANCHER PREDATOR AWARENESS MONITORING and SCENTING 2

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A monitoring program is an effort to determine predatory risks of any given area by determining whether there is predator presence. The monitoring effort needs to be maintained on a regular basis. It would be convenient if the area being monitored could be covered in one day. But most of the time the area will need to be monitored in sections. The effort should be a routine that puts you back to the first starting section within 7 to 10 days of the last visit.

There are many variables that enter into developing a program. Risks can be present in any terrain at any time that livestock are present. But there are times the risks are not worth the effort of monitoring. The predators require things also. Certain predators may tolerate certain terrain, temperatures, water availability, while others may not. By examining the geography, water supply and salt grounds, along with game trails, cow trails, and roads, we can understand the fundamental travel routes of a given range.

The geography of California dictates cattle presence from one season to the next. Those seasonal movements of livestock correspond to most of the predators and game. The main factor is the temperature and the presence of attractants. The Cattle and the game are the attractants.

There is a lot said about attractants, because there are so many things that can be considered attractants. There are quite a few who want to focus on the one that is popular at the time. As of 2019 in California it seems to be bone yards. This requires a little California history. Since the conquistadors first established the first missions for Spain in the late 1500's, California has had a cattle presence. In fact California's first industry was the hide and tallow trade for Spain. The first currency was a cow hide. At present California is the fourth largest cattle producer in the United States. That is a Cattle population in California of 5.2 million head (ref. Beef 2 live).

The national death loss is 1%. That's is 52,000 head of cattle that die naturally within California's State lines each year. Most of the rendering plants were closed for environmental reasons in the 1960's through the 1970's. The ranchers were forced to deal with those dead stock themselves. It is against regulations to bury or burn, so the piles were the only legal solutions.

Let's run some numbers: 52,000 head at an average cow weight of 1500 lbs. is 78 million lbs. per year. Which, when broken down to semi Loads, is 1560 semi loads per year, times 50 years, is 78,000 semi loads that we are talking about. Let's say that one semi would cost \$2500 to load and clean up a bone yard. That is a clean up cost of \$195 million dollars. To protect a product that is worth \$12 million. And if all bone yards are removed there are still many more attractants such as road kills.

In developing solutions it would be my opinion that removing attractants is at best a long-term project. It is also my belief that the wolf is a permanent fixture on the west coast. I believe that the best solution for wolf presence is to assume he is here, and protect our cattle.

Roads need to be monitored for the presence of scat. Canids often choose roadways to defecate. These can be gravel or paved. Game trails will often align with well travel roads with high traffic. These aligning

trails are often traveled by predators who monitor the well-trafficked roadways for roadkill. These game trails will often cross or intersect the roadways. That area is a priority checkpoint for tracks.

Scat characteristics — Canid families will have different size scats, wolves being the largest, and foxes being the smallest. But the characteristics of the canid scat will all be the same. Pinched to a point at least on one end. The canid will choose an open space or sometimes place it on an elevated spot.

Felines such as lions can actually resemble a wolf's scat. But the feline species bury theirs. Felines' choice spots are often loose types of soils or humus. The challenge is recognizing those loose types of venues and then recognizing the buried piles.

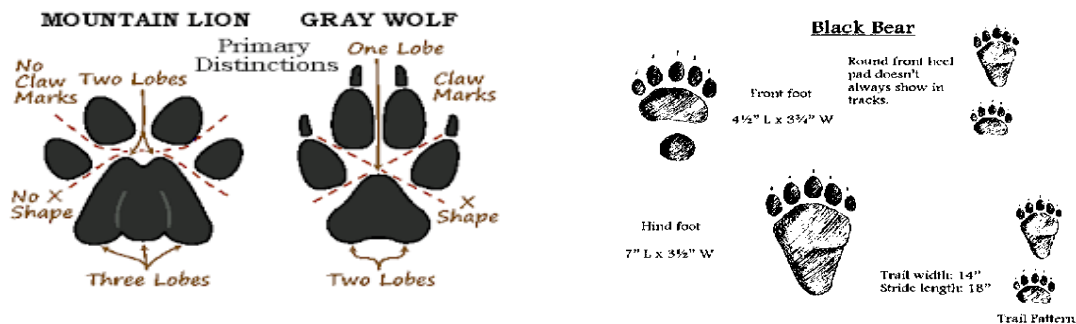
Bears scats are segmented, they don't have the pinched taper such as canine but have a broken flat end. Bears are omnivores, so scats consisting of cellulosic material are often found and left for easy identification. But bears' meat scats seem to disappear rather quickly, possibly as a protein source for other wildlife or smaller carnivorous.

Dogs, either *stockdogs* or *Predator Awareness* dogs are good to have along on Monitoring circles, as they often can be the alert and key to finding wildlife signs such as scats.

Evaluating — Scats are a key component to determining whether livestock losses have occurred. Besides presence, we need to check scats for herd losses to predators. Sometimes the clues that the scat reveals can be a first signal to a problem. For example maybe you find a coyote scat that contains some red cow hair, but your herd is predominately black. Since your neighbor's are predominantly red, the clue lends a suggestion of where to search for the problem—your neighbor's areas. But, you could possibly find some of your neighbor's cows in your area. That too is a possible predatory presence sign, even though the scat was determined to be from a coyote it may have just have been clean up from an apex predator. The neighbor's cows may be moved due to predatory pressures. Evaluating, is putting pieces together to understand the predatory presence.

Hair is a marker that can easily describe the predators diet and behavior. Hair remains undigested and retains its color. It is merely the diagnosis of what prey victim it came from. By using your boot and stepping down then sliding to the side, you smear the scat into a flat plate that can then be examined.

Tracks — Tracking requires a readable pallet for identification. Dry powered dirt or moist dirt are best for track identification. Although ideal tracking conditions seldom occur, there are characteristics that can determine species. Canids are all the same print, they just escalate in size, foxes being the smallest,



then Coyotes, and finally wolves. Felines follow the same way, bobcats to lions, only differentiated by their size.

In determining what created the track with a canid species, there are some distinctive characteristics that we can apply. But first, individual tracks, “one footprint,” should not attest to any one species, but attest to several possibilities. Guessing at one footprint is just that, “guessing”.

If we apply a number to each foot, the left front being number 1, the right front being number 2 the left hind number 3 and finally the right hind as number 4, we then can examine each gait of travel and understand what we are looking at. If we are looking at a walk, the cadence would be 1,4,2,3.

If we are tracking a dog, the left hind would be on the same left line as the left front. 1 and 3. And of course 2 and 4 would be on their own line. The left feet would be on the left and the right feet on the right. Both sides would have a void center space in between the left side and the right side. Livestock, horses, deer and dogs all travel in this way. Wild canids are a bit different in their movement. The cadence will remain the same 1,4,2,3. But the line traveled will not have a right nor left side. The line traveled will be one line with no center void to it. No left or right side all the feet would be on the same line. It should be understood that the line at a walk may wander a bit, zigzagging here and there. The pace that wild canids prefer is a dogtrot. At this trot they can cover long distances relatively quickly. It seems to be their preferred gait for travel. At this gait, the tracks for wild canids will appear in one continuous line. Giving them a very distinctive characteristic to their track identification.

SIGNS must be taken into account. Cattle that appear nervous, or are not in their proper place, are signs that should wave a red flag. Another is game in areas that are not normally visited by that game. Lack of other predators such as coyotes, should immediately create the thought “wolf.” Wolves will prey on coyotes, and coyotes will leave an area when they are present. Birds such as ravens and magpies will follow wolves looking for the next meal.

MARKERS — When monitoring, I may add in additional areas that may show something questionable. But as part of monitoring these routine trails, I will set *markers* that I check. They are placed somewhere



that I routinely pass. These *markers* are old boots or an empty aluminum can. They are placed as prizes, so to speak, to be taken to pups as toys. Sometimes the hunting adult takes such things to a rendezvous site. If the markers are missing, I look much closer for sign such as tracks. Pups of the canine species love to chew on cans and shoes. Seeing such accumulated junk should alert you to a possible rendezvous or den site.

All of our time is valuable. But when you are out monitoring, take the time to look at trash. Often there is sign of presence within that area.

CAMERA PLACEMENTS should be on trails that have a probable destination spots. These cow trails are often combined corridors of travel for game and livestock. They help monitor the cattle's disposition and predatory presence. A destination would be to water, salt or minerals or open tracts of abundant feed.

The placement of the camera should take those routes into consideration. But other placements may include your boneyard or dead animals that may not be retrievable from the range. Actual trash piles left by campers or hunters, or unexplained piles, and even the hunters' campsites after they have left. All of those places can be attractants. Do *not* place attractants in areas that you are trying to deter presence. Don't buy a scent and place it near your cattle to get some good pictures.

I like camera placements to be closer to the ground than some like. It helps me find more cover to disguise the camera placements. I don't like a predator to be able to see the camera when approaching it. I prefer that it had already passed its location and I got a few shots of it walking away. But that requires a one-way trail, and that's not reality. The effort then becomes a side shot. That's been the best placements for me.



SCENTING — People say that human presence is an effective deterrent. We as humans tend to think of that statement as if we are actually standing there. Human presence to a canine is scent. Just as hounds can track by scent, wild species can determine human presence in the same manner.

So what is human scent? When we think of human scent we think of the scents that offend us: perspiration, flatulence and bad breath. These are our natural scents. But they have been with humans

since the beginning, and I believe that predators are confident, and understand those particular human scents.

What is new and strange to the predators is the manufactured scents that we make to mask over scent that offend us. Scents that we are comfortable with are masking agents, manufactured scents. They



come in concentrated amounts to be diluted with water for cleaning or deodorizing.

By placing these scent deterrents undiluted in strategic placements they have a powerful suggestion of human presence. These scents that are soothing to us are quite an unknown and unsettling scent to predators. These scents have a wide selection of purposes and are economically affordable. They include laundry detergents to floor cleaners, deodorizers, and fabric softeners. The list is large.

Apply the scents high in the breeze and then reapply in seven to ten days with a new and different scent to avoid the scents becoming commonplace. The scent always presents a new and uncomfortable question of human presence.

Predator awareness and *scenting* take into account one of strongest instincts in all living animals, self-preservation. Self-preservation is a reaction to fear. When we present an unknown, it generates the reaction of self-preservation and tells the predator to move on, **detering presence.**

The response of our cattle reacting to a *predator's presence*, and applying the *Standing Solution*, and seeking the *defensive posture of the herd group*, is the second line of defense. Both efforts when combined, make an effective deterrent.