

ETHICS

FAIR CHASE

BIG GAME HUNTING

STATES WHERE ELECTRONIC GAME CALLS ARE ILLEGAL TO USE WHEN HUNTING BIG GAME:

- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Virginia
- Wisconsin

* For reference only. Be sure to check your local, state, and federal hunting regulations.

Making the Call

By Larry Weishuhn
B&C Professional Member

I held my rattling horns, a pair of sheds I had long used to entice rutting whitetail bucks to show themselves. My audience was several hunters gathered around the fire pit behind the store. I began telling them about my early-morning south Texas Brush Country experience.

"The three-year-old 10-point came charging in, hair standing on end, making him appear considerably big bodied," I said. "His eyes glanced wildly back and forth in search of an opponent, or perhaps a coy doe to steal while other suitor bucks fought. As he stopped long enough to search for the source of the sounds I made with my rattling horns, drool emerged and hung from his lower lip. No doubt, he was seriously in the rut!

"He had come to the rattling at a near run, quartering into the wind. As he passed directly downwind, he stopped suddenly, detecting an odor he had learned to associate with danger. Quickly looking back and forth, he tested the wind once more; snorted, turned and ran, disappearing into the brush. Had he been older, he'd have made the ride back here to Los Cazadores with me."

Bucks Right in the Backyard

No sooner had I finished relating the details of my morning hunt than I heard the sounds of two bucks fighting — not only antlers clashing, but also brush-breaking and deer vocalizing, as they tend to do in a real fight! This, while standing next to the fire pit on the backside of the Los Cazadores Hunting Headquarters and Contest Center, right next to Interstate 35 in Pearsall, Texas.

At first I thought it was my imagination, but if I was imagining the sounds which were growing louder, the others around the fire had heard the buck fight as well.

From just beyond the campfire came a voice: "There's nothing to sounding like two equally matched, mature whitetail bucks fighting! You don't need rattling horns, grunt calls, or your own voice, or even a pile of limbs to jump up and down on."

He spoke in an almost sarcastic voice from just outside the little group huddled around the warming fire. "All you need is the right chip on your electronic game call! Nothing to rattling or attracting whitetail bucks! Once you put the right chip in your call, you just press the button and wait for bucks to come running."

Normally, before responding, I tend to think through what I'm going to say, but I blurted out, "Using an electronic call to attract bucks, that's kinda like kissing your sister!"

"But that's just my opinion!" I added, followed by appreciative applause from around the fire.

The Calls of the Wild

Mankind learned how to imitate the sounds made by animals and birds long before the "electronic age." Calling game closer is not a technique that was only recently invented or discovered. But how game is being called today is an issue worth examining.

Is it ethical in terms of fair chase and hunting to entice an animal within range using your natural voice, a mouth-blown calling aid such as a diaphragm or reed call, or rattling horns (whether natural or synthetic), but not ethical to use an electronic device, which is perhaps a recording of an actual animal or event?

Technology in the world of game calling is changing quickly. Personally, I'm not sure I like it. I have been hunting long enough to remember a time when there were few, if any, electronic game calls, at least not in the part of Texas where I grew up. If someone called waterfowl, they did so using their natural voice, or hand-held and mouth-blown calls. If you wanted to attract predators and varmints, you imitated the sounds of a dying rabbit or bird by natural voice or with the aid of a mouth-blown call.

Back then, Texas did not have any spring turkey seasons, but in other states where turkey were hunted in the spring, the hunters used box, slate, or other friction calls (mouth diaphragm calls did not come about until Ben Rogers Lee started making them, and he and J. Wayne Fears started doing seminars about using the new type of turkey call). If you wanted to attract a buck, you used shed deer antlers or cut the antlers off a skull and banged them together to imitate the sounds of two bucks fighting. Or some hunters used their natural voices to duplicate the sound such bucks made when they fought, and they stomped on limbs and broke limbs to make it sound like two bucks pushing each other.

Up north, hunters pursuing moose used their own voices and made calls from rolled-up birch bark to imitate and project the sounds of a lovesick cow or a bull on the prowl. Calling or bugling bull elk didn't grow in popularity until during the early 1960s, when hunters such as Murray and

Winston Burnham (game-calling pioneers) and others started carrying around copper tubing to help them imitate the elk's bugle. Successful in their calling techniques, the two were often written about in national hunting journals.

Other savvy hunters, like my old friend and fellow Boone and Crockett Club Professional Member Jim Zumbo, pioneered "elk cow talk" using a variety of mouth-blown calls, today considered one of the most effective ways to entice a big bull within range.

Are the old ways always the best? And if new ways of calling are better, do they violate the rules of fair chase as most of us understand them?

A Personal Decision

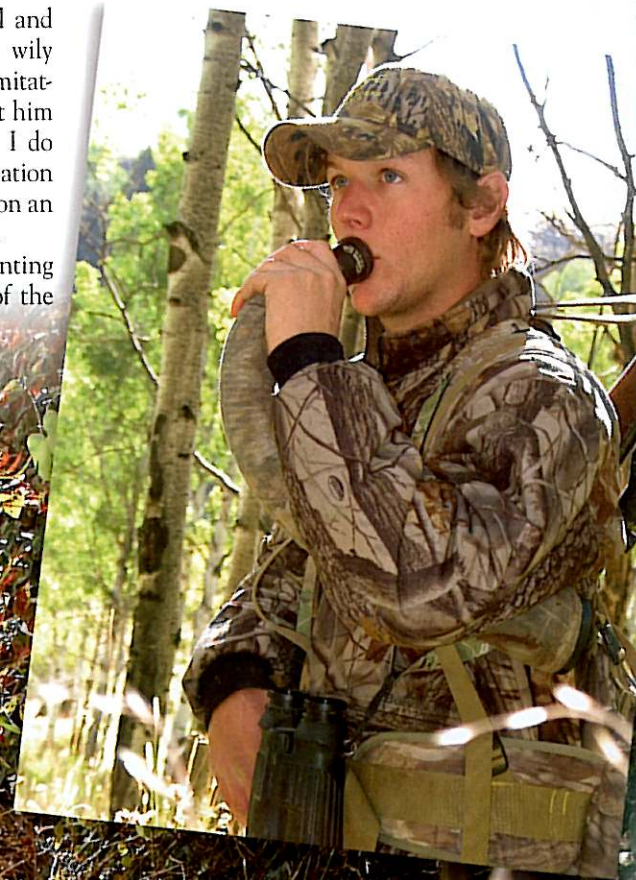
As always with ethical questions, the decision to use an electronic call, a mouth-blown call, or any other calling techniques comes down to a personal choice.

I have used both manual calls and electronic calls to attract a variety of critters. I can tell you about my personal experiences. There is something special and satisfying about attracting a mature, wily old buck, bull or boar by personally imitating or duplicating sounds that interest him sufficiently to respond to my efforts. I do not get the same satisfaction or gratification when all I have done is simply turned on an electronic device to attract an animal.

A couple of winters ago, hunting coyotes and bobcats after the close of the

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ETHICS FEEDBACK

We would like to encourage you to send us your thoughts about the topic featured in our "Ethics" series this quarter. These articles are meant to make you think and certainly are not intended to make decisions for you.

Please send your comments to:
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or e-mail with subject: FC Ethics to
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Texas whitetail season, ProRodeo Hall of Fame inductee Phil Lyne and I were having an absolute blast calling coyotes. On several stands we called up four or more of the predators and managed to dispatch a fair share of them as part of a large ranch's management program to decrease the predator population, which had been killing livestock.

Looking at the ranch's deer-census data, I noted fawn survival rates had been down as well, indicating predators played a definite role. Throughout the day Phil and I alternated calling duties. While we both had electronic calls at our disposal, we decided to use mouth-blown calls. Doing so made it a better hunting experience.

Would it have been fun to have watched coyotes respond to an electronic call? Sure it would have. But would it have given us the same sense of accomplishment had we used electronic calls, as opposed to enticing the coyotes as we did using mouth-blown calls? No way!

Let's return to the opening horn rattling discussion. You are hunting on a large South Texas ranch, or for that

Do you reach in your pocket to turn on the "rattling and deer calling" electronic machine? Or, after making a series of grunts on your grunt call or made with your own voice, do you reach for your set of rattling horns? Which will give you a greater sense of accomplishment?

matter a woodlot in Iowa or Kentucky. You know there's a truly big buck in the area you're hunting, because you've done your homework and paid attention to scouting reports from others. It's just breaking day, legal light finally arrives. You spot a freshly rubbed tree, sap still oozing, that obviously could have only been "destroyed" by a big antlered buck. You know the rut is kicking off big time. You pick up your binoculars and focus on a scrape about 50 yards away. It's steaming. The buck has just been there.

Quickly, though deliberately and slowly, you scan all you can see. Is the buck still there, or has he moved off, perhaps to bed in the dense thicket less than 100 yards away? Even though you have not yet seen the buck, you imagine him big, at least big enough to rank in the three-year Awards records book, if not the All-time record book.

The rut is just kicking off, based on what you've heard from other hunters in camp. The day before, hunters started rattling up bucks, and not just young bucks, but old warriors as well.

You've got shooting lanes both to the left and right of directly downwind. You position yourself so you can take advantage of these lanes and take the big buck when he responds before he gets directly downwind to scent you.

The time is right!

Do you reach in your pocket to turn on the "rattling and deer calling" electronic machine? Or, after making a series of grunts on your grunt call or made with your own voice, do you reach for your set of rattling horns? Which will give you a greater sense of accomplishment, a sense of hunting pride, when the buck steps out having responded to the sounds of two bucks fighting, and, moments later, when you walk to his side to admire the biggest buck you've taken in a lifetime of hunting? ■

