

# Member's Hunt

**W**hile carrying out the rigorous duties associated with my job as a game biologist, I was hiking in the beautiful Chiricahua Mountains along Arizona's border with Mexico. I was accompanied by retired wildlife researcher Jerry Day, and we were looking for his old deer research plots located back in the range's rugged canyons. It wasn't easy keeping up with my 70-year-old companion, but after a few hours we located the most inaccessible study plot and sat to rest.

It wasn't long before we heard the bleating distress call of a Coues whitetail fawn across the canyon. After a short search with binoculars, we located the fawn, which had a hungry golden eagle attached, via sharp talons, to its back. As we watched this remarkable scene, it was obvious the eagle would make quick work of the young deer. Suddenly, the large bird of prey flew away and was immediately replaced by a juvenile black bear that had come running to the sound of the fawn's distress. After a few minutes of cat-and-mouse, or rather bear-and-fawn, the fawn succumbed to the inevitable, and the bear slept well with a full stomach that night.

A month later the bear season in the Chiricahuas opened. Baiting is not allowed in these isolated mountains, and the only running my dogs do when bears are around is away from them. No worry: I knew that area held a bear that was familiar with and attracted to the sounds of a bleating fawn. Opening weekend I went back into the same area where I'd seen the bear kill the little Coues deer.

Friday at midnight I parked my truck and backpacked by moonlight to set up a spike camp more than a mile into the mountains. Saturday morning I set up and started calling like a fawn in distress with a regular predator call. My fawn imitation was apparently right on the mark, because whitetail does kept walking up to me looking very agitated and making the soft buzzing noise they use to locate their fawns at close range.

At noon I sat under an oak tree to eat lunch, and as I started fixing my meal I saw a bear peek around from behind a clump of bear grass (appropriately enough) and look at me from six yards away! He was almost in my lap. He immediately saw his error and backed up quickly. I sat in disbelief for a second and tried to recall what I'd eaten and why it was causing hallucinations. I stood up with my rifle, and the bear was still standing 10 yards away looking at me. He was a very small yearling, so I

let him continue on his way. By 3 p.m. I was calling from a high ridgeline overlooking a large canyon and saw a bear a half-mile downcanyon, swimming across a small pond. He stopped on the near side and shook off. I screamed like a fawn with the call, and he immediately broke into a run at full speed—toward me! It took a while for him to cover all that ground, so I kept calling to keep him on track. Bears really look much larger when you are on the ground and they are running full speed at you. When he got within 25 yards (that's close enough, thank you), I dropped him in his tracks.

## Calling Bears On The Border

By Jim Heffelfinger, Tucson, Arizona



Photo By Author

After having a small bear nearly help me finish my lunch, I dropped this one when it responded to my fawn-imitating call by running within 25 yards.

I packed (staggered) the head/hide and camp gear out that night over 1½ miles of very rugged terrain, slept in my truck through a terrible storm, and went back Sunday morning for the meat, which I had hung in cheesecloth meat bags high in an oak tree. The rain kept the meat cool during the night. A torrential downpour hammered me when I was halfway out with the load. I could hardly walk with the rain pelting me so hard, but the sharp crackle of lightning so close to my packframe helped quicken my pace off the ridge.

Besides a freezer full of bear meat and a beautiful rug, I also came home with chigger bites, sunburn, a twisted ankle, blisters on my hands and feet, a bruised knee, and aches in muscles I didn't even know I had. Later, my coworkers would say they had never seen another deer biologist go through so much trouble to avenge the loss of one whitetail fawn.



Photo By Neal & Mary Jane Mishler

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