



Elk Hunting's Newest Secret

You've got to act like a cow to get a bull. Here's an elk-calling technique that will work even after the rut. Cow calls—elk hunting may never be the same.

By Jim Zumbo, Editor-at-Large

The bull elk was not cooperating. He screamed at me from a dense pocket of lodgepole pines, and I bugled back. Again he responded but refused to come out. I heard him whining and thrashing brush with his antlers, and I knew that he was hot but not upset enough to tear after me.

I figured that the bull was in one of two situations: He was a herd bull with cows and wasn't about to leave the girls to run me off; or he was a loner recently whipped by a bigger bull and didn't want to get knocked around again. Either way, I wasn't having any luck enticing him out of the heavy cover.

As the vocal exchange continued, the elk started dashing madly back and forth in the timber. Because he was running about, I was sure that he was a loner rather than a herd bull. If he had a harem of cows, his typical reaction would be to move them farther away from a challenging bull, or at least stay in one place.

It was time for different logic. I wasn't getting anywhere with the bugle. This bull obviously wasn't anxious to encounter another bull, but would he come running to a cow? I decided to try the ruse.

I started trotting away from the bull at a quartering angle, purposely breaking branches as I ran. Then I stopped and used the cow call.

The effect on the bull was dramatic and immediate, and I was taken by surprise. Screaming as lustily as he could, the big animal crashed through the timber and came looking for me. He was so close that I knew I'd see him at any moment, but just then a gust of wind carried my scent directly toward him. My gun was up to my shoulder, and my finger was ready to slip off the safety, but I was betrayed at the last second by the errant breeze. I got a look at the tips of his antlers just above a blowdown 20 yards away, but that was it. The terrified elk spun and ran off in fright.

I cursed the wind for my bad luck. If the breeze had been delayed just a second or two, the bull would have entered a fairly open stand of pines, and I'd have had an excellent shot.

Walking away disappointed, I was nonetheless excited about using the cow tactic. It had worked well, and I realized that I had encountered a brand-new dimension in elk hunting.

Using a cow call to attract bull elk
continued on page 72