

The tech of camouflage - in hunters and prey

Seems everyone outdoors is wearing camouflage these days, especially the hunters. I get a kick out of rifle hunters who don expensive camo outfits, then wear a blaze orange safety vest and hat on top of it all. I am guilty of that as well.

If you were to try and purchase hunting clothes that were not camo, you will spend a great deal of time searching, and very little finding. Perhaps some of the clothes in Khaki and other solid colors can be found for safaris wear if you were heading to Africa. Most African countries do not allow camouflage clothing because poachers use it. Some countries have a "shoot poachers on sight" law, so you best leave the camo at home.

When I was a kid, most of our outdoor ensemble consisted of military surplus from the second World War. There was almost no camo clothing available to us. All the clothes we wore were four sizes too large and a delightful olive drab color. We looked more like a rag-tag army infantry core heading to the woods instead of kids going camping.

Up until the mid-1800s, militaries around the world over dressed their soldiers in uniforms of bright colors. British troops, for example, wore bright red,



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

hence the term "red coats."

It did not take the "marksmen" (an early version of the sniper) long to figure out these brightly clad soldiers were easy targets because they stood out like a sore thumb. These marksmen often wore flat colors, like light brown and grey, to blend in to the surrounding whilst they picked off the brightly dressed officers and soldiers.

The military khaki, which is a Persian word meaning dust, arose in the mid-19th century. Soldiers in the British Indian Army began dyeing their white uniforms with a mixture of tea and curry. This produced a khaki color that not only ended the soldier's problem of keeping his uniform spanking white, it made him much less visible as a target.

The animal world has a remarkable use and selection of camouflage. I remember fishing for bonefish on the flats of the Florida

Keys. These waters were less than two feet deep and the marl bottom consisted of sparse vegetation and grasses with most everything being the color of sand.

Bonefish would cruise these flats in search of a shrimp or crab for a meal. These wary game fish had bright, chrome coloring that reflected the sea bottom, making them near impossible to see, especially without a highly trained eye. It is why catching one was such an accomplishment.

There are four basic types of camouflage in the animal world. The first is the basic concealing coloration. This is where an animal basically hides itself against a background of the same color. An example would be a polar bear, whose bright white coloring helps him blend in with his arctic surroundings.

Mule deer are another example of concealing coloration. Their tan and brown coloring help them blend into the grasslands and scrub areas in which they reside. In many cases, a deer can be difficult to see unless you catch some movement, such as the twitch of a tail or an ear.

The next type of camouflage would be the disruptive coloration. This is when animals have spots or stripes, or patterns to break up their outline in

the wilds. A classic example is the Zebra of the African continent. Closer to home, an animal with incredible disruptive coloring would be the pronghorn. The pattern of tans, browns, black and white make them very difficult to see at a distance.

Disguise is another form of camouflage used by animals. This is when an animal blends into the surroundings by looking like something else. An insect that looks like a tree branch or leaf is using a costume to hide from predators. Walking sticks, caterpillars and leaf insects use this type of camouflage.

This type of camouflage has a severe drawback. Consider a praying mantis, which sits on a leaf and is pretty well undetectable. The camo that works so well on a green leaf would render the mantis easy prey in a different setting. Nature can be cruel.

The fourth type of camouflage used in the animal kingdom is mimicry. Mimicry is when animals and insects look like dangerous, bad tasting or poisonous animals or insects. Snakes, fish, butterflies and moths use this type of deception. A classic example would be the king snake, which looks very similar to the deadly coral snake.

When considering clothing for your outdoor pursuits, you must consider the vision of the quarry you wish to stalk. Hoofed animals like deer, elk, moose, goats, and sheep all evolved with very similar eyesight. They are all dichromate with cones in their eyes that perceive yellows and blues. This means they are colorblind to the red spectrum.

Like technology, camouflage is evolving. I don't mean just the "color or pattern of the month" as some companies produce. These advances are merely to catch the consumer, and if you purchase the product, you are a case in point.

My favorite example is the fishing lure, displayed in a package with bright colors, designed to catch the eye, and eventually the wallet, of a shopping fisherperson. The bright packaging would do little to enhance the appetite of a fish.

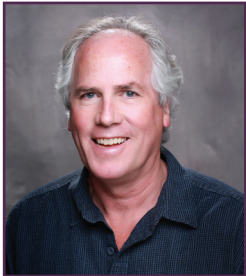
High-tech camouflage can now conceal body heat from sensors and heat detecting vision equipment. Technology also has the ability to harness fiber optics to match dynamically to its surroundings. Science is progressing towards a camouflage that actually bends light waves to render objects or people completely invisible, just like an episode of The Twilight Zone.

Modern outdoor clothing is also progressing in methods of masking, or eliminating human scent. Most animals have a sense of smell far greater than human beings. Eliminating our human scent in the woods is a new form of camouflage that is developing.

In a way, I miss my days of wearing the old army clothes in the woods. Our method of camouflage consisted of staying still, and not letting animals detect our movement. That theory still holds true today. The animal kingdom can see you move no matter how high-tech your clothing is. Now if they can come up with a camouflage for husbands who want to hide from spouses who seek someone to do a chore, we would be making progress.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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