

Photographs by Brad Trent

By Joe Kita

Men are natural hunters, but our instincts are being subverted. Here's how to unleash the animal within to build confidence, ease stress and improve athletic performance.

WE'RE SITTING ON A BENCH IN IDAHO'S TREASURE VALLEY

watching a cat named Tip hunt field mice. Buz Fawcett, owner and

instructor for the Wingshooting Workshop: An Instinctive Shooting

School, has momentarily surrendered the podium to the expert.

"Watch her," he whispers.

After spotting something in the brush, Tip has frozen in midstride.

Her chin rises slightly to point at the prey, and her eyes focus with a

laser's intensity. Then, in an instant, she attacks—one smooth, sud-

den strike leaves the mouse struggling between her teeth.

Like most domesticated animals, Tip no longer hunts for survival.

She has all the Meow Mix she needs in her bowl in the old mobile

home parked on the shooting grounds. Instead, she hunts out of

Bringing Out





at Your Beast

instinct and primal satisfaction, explains Fawcett. Then, with a gaze similar to Tip's, he looks at me and says: "You have that in you, too. It's the predator."

Hunting for the Sweet Spot

Fawcett, 63, has been described as a "crazed shotgun prophet" who's "part shaman, part showman." These brown fields on the brink of the Great Basin near Boise are what he calls his sacred place, where he hears ancient voices, he says, and gathers inspiration.

"I'm surprised I don't see crop circles or some damn thing out here," he says while scratching his reddish-white beard. "It's where everything comes to me. If I were a religious man,

my hair would probably stand on end."

The flyer for Fawcett's small school advertises a "master gunner program," guaranteeing to raise an experienced shooter's accuracy to between 75 and 98 percent after just three days of one-on-one instruction. He goes as far as to claim that "most shotgun shooters in this country are lousy shots" and "most instructors don't know what they're doing." While his 300 graduates can attest to his unique expertise, he's even more adept at infusing them with an intriguing theory of life that goes far beyond this sport and his 30-acre shooting compound.

"It was worth taking the class even if I never pulled a trigger," says Tracey Harmon, a 39-year-old entrepreneur in nearby

MASTER BLASTER: When your predator is in control, time advances frame by frame, bringing the target into slow-motion focus.



business school I ever attended." "What really surprised me is that we didn't instantly start banging away," he says. "Instead, we discussed philosophy, the evolution of men, tribal aspects of a baseball team, all before shooting one round. But taught me more about being successful than any business school I ever attended." Fawcett's philosophy is based on something he heard in class decades ago. A teacher once said that the average person consciously uses only 10 percent of his brain; geniuses employ maybe 15. Like a burr in his trademark breeches, this knowledge pestered him. Why would nature, so efficient everywhere else, tolerate such a wasted resource? "I couldn't believe it," he says. "There had to be a purpose." Drawing from observations made during 30 years as an army shooting instructor and outdoor journalist, photographer and filmmaker, Fawcett developed a theory that he calls the Predator. Inside each one of us, occupying that remaining 85 to 90 percent of our brain, is a dozing creature. It is an extremely intelligent and powerful beast that harbors untold years of human experience and instinct. Awaken it and you not only benefit from this wisdom but also gain self-confidence, improve athletic performance, ease stress and take better control of almost every part of life. "It's like software that's already programmed into the computer," explains Fawcett, who speaks with the velvet eloquence and deep conviction of a minister. "You just have to know how to access it." Even if you're not ready to buy Fawcett's philosophy, you've probably already met your inner animal. If you've ever hit a home run, it was your predator who spotted that fat fastball and swung the bat so perfectly. If you've ever surprised yourself with a reaction so swift and sure that it left you wondering where it came from, then it was your predator on the prowl.

Fighting to Be Herd

"The introduction usually occurs when you're startled, say, by the sudden flush of a prey animal or bird when you're hunting," explains Fawcett. "Your body moves, seemingly of its own will, and in a moment the quarry is down. You're astonished. What most people don't realize is that it's possible to replicate this experience over and over." The key, Fawcett insists, is surrendering the conscious mind. That fastball, for example, reaches the plate in 0.4 seconds. Considering the time it takes to swing a bat, this leaves only 0.15 seconds to decide what to do. Likewise, instantly calculating the speed, trajectory and angle needed to make a shot that can bisect a bird in midflight seems impossibly complex. "Yet we can do it in a twinkling," he says. "That's why so much of our brain is devoted to it. . . . The predator is the reflex action that shuts down our conscious self and takes over with the pure genius of instinct." And oh, does that feel good. When the predator stirs, it takes over our entire being, focuses all of our energy, compresses time, and then, when it's finished, leaves us with a "fierce sense of satisfaction," says Fawcett—"a roaring elation." It is, quite simply, the essence of being alive.

It used to be that the predator and the man were barely indistinguishable. When human beings first roamed the Rift Valley or, more recently, the prairies of this fledgling country, they had to depend on their wits and intuition for daily survival. But in the last hundred years or so, the predator has been progressively contained, caged behind the bars of mindfulness and socialized behavior.

"Society is trying to turn us into benign creatures," says Fawcett. Today's man is discouraged from crying, yelling, slamming doors, coming on strong to the ladies, smashing grandy snifters and asking adversaries to step outside. Hunting is considered barbarous in many circles, red meat is bad for your health, and sports are something we watch more often than play. Our traditional release valves are being soldered up, while life inflicts more and more pressure. "But to deny the predator is to risk a buildup of aggression, hostility and stress," he warns.

Fawcett sees the repercussions of this in the twin epidemics of stress-related illness and escalating violence. He even goes so far as to suggest that we've gotten so out of touch with our predator that we're becoming prey—exhibiting such typical "hunted" behavior as living in a near-constant state of adrenalinized alert and herding together in apartment complexes and suburban developments for safety.

As an antidote, most men have taken to feeding their predators with raw, vicarious experiences such as Bruce Willis films, pro football and computer games such as Doom. It's the Roman colosseum with 21st-century lions. "But simulations are not the same as actually doing it," says Fawcett. "It doesn't give you the same release, the same purring sense of satisfaction."

Before you get the wrong idea, understand that Fawcett isn't suggesting you upend the china cabinet to attain inner peace. Despite its name, the predator is not intrinsically angry or violent. It does not thrive on malevolence or murder but rather on the pure, synchronized joy of the instinctive attack, whether the prey is a 12-point buck, a fastball on the inside corner, an opponent's queen in a game of chess or a clay target launched across the blue Idaho

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IN HIS SIGHTS: *After masking his student's dominant eye with tape, Fawcett teaches him how to see with another side of himself.*

sky. Like the muscles in your body, the predatory instinct needs to be exercised. Its health and well-being heavily influences yours.

Unleashing the Beast

If Fawcett is beginning to sound less like a crazed prophet and more like a wise old guy who might be on to something, then welcome to the club. Chris Bryant, another 39-year-old student/disciple, who runs a vineyard and importing business in Summit, Mississippi, says that recognizing and regularly exercising his predator has helped him become more relaxed, focused and emotionally healthy.

"The mind is an unbridled horse," he says. "It wants to run free in a daily flow of consciousness. But Buz pointed out the need to give the conscious mind a rest and let this other part of the mind take over."

Patricia Price, a licensed mental-health counselor and psychotherapist who specializes in "consciousness studies," generally agrees with Fawcett's theory. "I like to call the experience a cerebral orgasm," she says, "a connection with something deep inside yourself. It can be addictive, it feels so good."

To find and unleash your inner predator, let Fawcett give you a crash course in instinctive shooting. Despite how you may feel about guns, hunting is still the oldest and easiest way to make the animal in you stir. Plus, the three main lessons he'll guide you through have a certain carryover value in the rest of your life. This isn't just about instinctive shooting, it's about instinctive living.

Practice, then forget. "Tell me something," says Fawcett, adjusting the brim on his beaver-fur hat. "Do you dance?"

"Do I dance?"

"Yeah. Shooting a shotgun should be like ballroom dancing. An instinctive shooter has a beautiful appearance. The movement is almost hypnotic; the firearm seems to be part of the body. The predator makes it look easy. Here, follow me. . . ."

And so I rumba with the master, mimicking his every smooth move. Our right legs step forward and our back knees slightly bend until we've assumed the proper shooting stance. It feels awkward at first because it's the opposite of the way most right-handed people hold a gun, yet it results in better balance, accuracy and protection from recoil. Using imaginary guns, we mount, point, fire; mount, point, fire. Instead of tracing a lazy arc across the sky with our barrels, we practice shooting like the rattlesnake strikes.

"Rehearse this in your mind before you go to bed tonight," says Fawcett, a 99.9 percent shooter himself. "Your inner predator is still a baby. The way to make it grow is through repetition. Teach it the rules, the basic movements, then forget them. Move out of its way and let it do what it does best."

Point, never aim. Fawcett is careful never to use the word "aim" in his instructions. That's because when you aim, you think—consciously trying to direct the gun toward the target. It's better not to see the gun barrels at all, he contends. In fact, he removes the sights from the tips of all his firearms so there are no distractions. You point the gun

as you would a spear or, more simply, your finger. "Stand behind a child and tell him or her to point at something that's in motion," he says. "What you'll see if you follow the child's finger is that the baby predator automatically builds in an allowance for the moving target."

This "pointing" is vital to the instinctive response. Pitchers do it with their gloves, quarterbacks with their opposite arms, archers with their bow fingers—and they all do it without thinking. It represents the moment at which all the necessary calculations are made, the pause before the attack, when that 90 percent of the brain is humming. In shooting, you point with the extended arm that grips the barrels and, in honor of Tip, with a lift of the chin.

Get a pair of snake eyes. Part of being able to point is seeing your prey *exactly*. Before she springs, the lioness is not looking at the entire wildebeest, says Fawcett, but at the tip of its nose—the leading edge of the target. You can teach yourself to do the same by narrowing your focus on everyday things. Don't simply watch a crow fly overhead; search for its beak. Don't just look at the person you're talking to; zero in on his or her pupils. Train yourself to look at the corners, the crannies, the edges of things.

Such heightened awareness will crack the gloss we put on life, sharpen our experience of the world and enhance performance. "When you're playing darts, don't focus on the bull's-eye; choose a spot within the bull's-eye," says Fawcett. "If you're whitewater rafting, look at the one rapid that can hurt you most. Ted Williams could see the stitches on a baseball."

Fawcett uses two tricks to help his students see like a predator. One is a pair of glasses with yellow lenses that heighten contrast and shrink the pupils to pinpoints. The other is his favorite scene from the film *Little Big Man*, in which Dustin Hoffman's movie sister explains why the secret to shooting a six-gun is going "snake eyes." "That's it! That's the look of the predator before it strikes," says Fawcett, almost trembling with vindication. "Face slackened, eyes hooded over as if in a trance, focus absolutely zeroed in."

Bringing Him Home

"You hungry?" asks Fawcett, after almost three hours of verbal instruction inside the mobile home.

"Yeah, I could use a sandwich."

"Good," he says, making no move toward the cooler. "You shoot better when you're hungry. Otherwise, all the blood is in your stomach. Let's go."

So I follow him outside, ready—I suppose—to finally meet my predator. There are 16 shooting fields scattered across the grounds. It's like a golf course, except that the cups are small clay disks or "birds" sent spinning through the air, and the par for each is a single shot. I carry a beautifully burnished, 12-gauge, side-by-side shotgun. Fawcett calls Hop-a-Long. Since I've never shot a real firearm before, I'm scared, both by this weapon and the expectation that I'm actually supposed to hit something. But Fawcett tells me not to worry. Just relax and let the predator take over.

It's no simple matter out on the firing range. As a novice, I have so many things to remember that I can't possibly permit myself to relax. As with any other challenge, my intellect wants to dissect and control it. And so, target after target falls to the ground unbroken.

"This is tough," I say.

"Only if you *think* it is," he replies.

To ease my frustration and remind myself of how simple this should be, Fawcett has me set aside the gun and point at a few

airborne targets with my finger. Then, with Hop-a-Long back in hand, he calls, "Bird!" I react and the target is dust. It all feels so smooth, so natural, so fulfilling that I rejoice and immediately want to do it again.

The damndest thing about it is that time seems to crawl. Whereas I had previously been rushing to mount, point and shoot in the few milliseconds afforded, now it's as if the bird flies in slow motion and my reaction to it is liquid. Suddenly, instead of trying to hit any part of the target, I'm looking for the front edge—and Ted Williams doesn't seem so extraordinary after all.

"The predator has the ability to compress time and view speed differently," explains Fawcett. Ping-Pong players, for instance, don't see the ball moving as fast as spectators do. It's an illusion created by the focused mind.

"Time is an experience," explains Patricia Price. "That's all it is. When you take yourself out of the measurement of time, then you can be in the world in a different way. There's a lot of paradox. To think clearly, you have to not think; to have energy, you must be still; and to perform well, you just have to *do* it."

Before long, I'm shooting more consistently, and I even nail a "following pair"—two birds launched in quick succession. I shoot 50 rounds of ammunition that afternoon and 250 more the next day. By the end of the workshop, I'm shooting better than 70 percent—marksmanship territory for a tenderfoot.

But my score isn't the sole source of satisfaction. I know the "feeling" now, and how to evoke the beast within. I realize, with newfound clarity, why in certain situations my conscious mind gets in the way. And I can laugh along with Fawcett at the framed motto inside his trailer: "*Cogito Ergo Non Ferro*," or "I think, therefore I miss."

Most important, I've begun to see my predator in other aspects of life. When I finish a long run or bike ride and recline in the cool renewal of contentment, I feel that it was my predator's legs that brought me here, and it is healthful. And when I find myself in a tough situation where my heart races and my voice cracks, I know that I can draw guidance from this force inside me, and it will be right.

"Buz gave me a different outlook on everyday occurrences," says Harmon, who plans to return for a refresher course. "I don't care if you're playing ice hockey, swinging a baseball bat or organizing a business, before you can achieve what you want, you have to understand who you are. Then you can decide on your purpose, lay the groundwork and focus on this edge."

"I set aside 15 minutes every morning and afternoon to clear my mind of all its traffic," says Bryant, a former Junior Olympic swimmer. "Call it meditation if you want, but for me it's simply a quiet, restful state. It's tough to do, because the mind doesn't like to be handcuffed. But once you train yourself, it's like a natural drug, and it helps you to focus better. That's how I stay in touch with my instinctive self."

"I hope you realize," concludes Fawcett, snapping closed the latch- es on his gun case, "that I haven't really taught you anything new here. I've simply led you down an ancient path that already existed within you."

Somewhere Tip purrs contentedly, and I know now why she is satisfied. ♦

For more information about the three-day Wingshooting Workshop, send a business-size self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Buz Fawcett, 2090 S. Meridian Rd., Meridian, ID 83642, or call (208) 888-3415. Cost is \$850, targets and shells extra.

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