

CBM Product Profile

GENE SCHANG

From late September till the middle part of November, it is almost a guarantee that, if I am out hunting, I am sitting in a tree stand chasing deer. I will also be the first to admit that by the time our archery seasons begin to wind down, I am experiencing major burnout. One can sit on a 16X24 inch platform, staring at the same landscape only for so long, before yearning for a change of pace. Thankfully, just as archery seasons are beginning to close, predator hunting seasons are just starting to hit their prime. I am probably not the only archery hunter who has chosen to extend his hunting time in the field over the past several years by chasing predators.

Predator numbers are expanding across this country, which makes them an ideal opportunity for those looking for a new challenge. The hunt is fast paced, challenging, rewarding, and helps to control the populations and their impacts on prey species. In the case of wild swine, their populations are exploding, which is causing major damage to native habitats. While most hunters who pursue predators opt for firearms, the use of bow hunting equipment among predator hunters is growing in relation to the exponential growth of the sport of archery. The ever growing use of crossbows has resulted in many crossbow enthusiasts adding lights to their bows and hitting the woods to join in on the fun.

MEETING THE DEMAND

Predator Hunter Outdoors is based in the hunter friendly state of Michigan. On a recent trip to Michigan to attend a fundraiser for the Michigan Crossbow Federation, I discovered that this state's residents have a great passion for hunting. It reminded me of my home state of Pennsylvania in many ways. Paul Cianciolo, the company's founder and long time predator hunter, wanted to improve upon the predator hunting equipment that hunters had to choose from when outfitting themselves for the field. He went to the drawing board with a vision to produce state of the art night hunting systems that gave the consumer all of the tools that they would need to hunt under the cover of darkness. The NightSnipe lights and predator hunting systems were born. Paul, developed night hunting packages that are essentially custom assembled to meet the specific demands of the consumer. Single NightSnipe lights are available, or the consumer can choose from many package options with multiple lights, accessories, LED colors, and mounting options. By all accounts, this approach to predator hunting equipment has been well received as business has been steadily increasing since these systems hit the market.

THE ULTIMATE PACKAGE

Crossbow Magazine's good friends at Darton Archery made us aware of the night hunting systems that Predator Hunter Outdoors was putting together. I spoke with Paul several times, and he wanted us to take a close look at one of his predator hunting packages and the new NightSnipe Headlamp from a crossbow perspective. Michigan legalized crossbows for all archers several years ago. As a result, more and more crossbow hunters are looking at lighting options that will work with crossbows. Paul was eager to have us put his products through their paces on a variety of crossbows.

We received what Predator Hunter Outdoors catalogs as the Class 4 Ultimate Snipe kit and the NightSnipe Headlamp to review. Paul customized the package somewhat to meet our needs for use on crossbows, so the kit I reviewed is slightly different from the standard Class 4 package. The Ultimate Snipe kit arrived in a high quality, hard sided plastic case complete with precise cut outs in the waffle foam inserts for the lights and assorted accessories. The Ultimate Snipe kit includes two



NightSnipe night hunting lights; four, 100,000 hour, two mode, CREE LEDs in your choice of white, green, or red along with a tool to change out the LED module in the Razorback light; four rechargeable Lithium Ion batteries, complete with a car charger and a standard wall charger, along with a pressure switch tailcap for each light. What sets the Ultimate Snipe kit apart from other kits are the included five mounting options to attach the NightSnipe lights to your firearm or bow in several different ways. Extra o-rings, allen wrenches, and Velcro attachment strips round out the package.

The kit I received was slightly customized since Crossbow Magazine looks at products from an archery hunting perspective. To meet the growing demand for archery specific products, Predator Hunter Outdoors developed a NightSnipe light specifically for archery hunting. The Razorback is a slightly smaller version of the standard NightSnipe light and was included in the kit I received. I also received the NightSnipe Headlamp to review. The headlamp arrived with a white, two mode, CREE LED installed, two Lithium Ion rechargeable batteries, and a standard wall charger.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Each NightSnipe hunting light is precision machined from T-6 aircraft grade aluminum. Rubber o-rings keep the weather out of both the bezel and tail cap ends of the light. There is clearly an attention to quality, as the lenses are not the typical plastic format which is easily scratched. Tempered glass is used to increase scratch resistance: this helps to maintain the quality of the light beam. I unscrewed each bezel and inspected the reflectors, which were polished to a mirror finish with no fingerprints, scratches, or smudges. After removing the reflectors, the CREE LEDs were exposed. Predator Hunter Outdoors supplies a removal tool to swap out the different LEDs in the Razorback light. The NightSnipe light does not require a special tool to change the LEDs. The LED modules are threaded into the light housing and were easily removed and re-installed in less than a minute. LED modules are specific to each light. You cannot install an LED module from the Razorback light into the NightSnipe light and vice versa.

The user has a choice of the standard push button pressure tail cap or a wired pressure switch tail cap to activate the light. Each pressure switch easily stretched to 24 inches which is more than enough for any mounting position. A threaded bolt for standard stabilizer holes extends from the Razorback's pressure switch tail cap for those who wish to also use it on vertical bows. The NightSnipe and Razorback lights require only one of the two supplied batteries included with each light, ensuring plenty of hunting time in the field. At 7 inches long and 9 ounces in weight, the NightSnipe is not overly large or heavy for its intended application. The Razorback is a bit more compact at 6 inches in total length. Both have standard one inch tube diameters.

The Ultimate Snipe kit includes 5 light mounting options with four of them applicable to crossbows. For those with picatinny rail space available, two of the supplied rings will attach directly to any free picatinny rail. With more and more crossbows incorporating picatinny rails into their designs, this mounting option will work with many of today's bows. This is the preferred method to mount lights to crossbows if you plan to use a pressure tailcap. A universal scope mount allows the crossbow enthusiast to mount any of the NightSnipe lights to your existing scope. It is important to note that a lack of free picatinny rail space will necessitate mounting the light to the scope; $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of free scope tube space is required for both scope tube mounting options.

The NightSnipe Headlamp came with the white high intensity CREE LED installed. The consumer is not able to change LED colors as they are able to with the other Night Snipe lights. High impact glass is used on the NightSnipe Headlamp as well, ensuring scratch resistance. Two Lithium Ion batteries fit snugly into the battery housing for a slightly longer run time than the gun mounted lights since most will use the headlamp for scanning. To charge the batteries, the user simply attaches the supplied wall charger directly to the battery pack. The headlamp is mounted to a contoured forehead plate with plenty of adjustment available in the elastic bands that secure the unit to the hunter's head.

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I elected to mount the NightSnipe light onto a Mission MXB400 crossbow using the supplied picatinny ring mount. The MXB400 crossbow features a rather long picatinny rail under the barrel. This mounting location makes it easy to use the pressure switch tail cap. I attached the pressure plate to the forward grip using the supplied adhesive Velcro. By simply applying light pressure with my thumb to the pressure plate, the light can be toggled on and off with virtually no movement. By attaching the light in this fashion, all of the coiled wire is safely kept below the rail and out of the path of the crossbow's string. This mounting option is the safest for those wishing to utilize a pressure plate tail cap.

For those without free picatinny rail space, mounting hunting lights to the scope itself becomes the next option. Since the factory scope on my CAMX Chaos 325 has $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of free tube space, I elected to mount the Razorback light to the scope utilizing the universal scope mount. While the pressure switch tail cap can be utilized using the scope mounted option, you have to be extremely careful with where you attach the pressure plate on crossbows. In order to keep the wire free from the path of the string, the pressure plate has to be located in the rear grip area, instead of the fore grip. This places the wire in close proximity to the string latch area and certainly impedes the cocking process required with crossbows. To err on the side of safety, I elected to stick to the standard push button tail cap for scope mounting the Razorback light on the CAMX.

INTO THE FIELD

Before hitting the fields for some real world testing, I spent some time becoming intimately familiar with all three NightSnipe Hunting Lights. I soon discovered that switching between high and low modes on the gun mounted lights did not require a full engagement of the buttons on the tail caps or pressure plates. An audible click is associated with fully depressing the switches, but this can be avoided by simply applying light pressure to the switch, then releasing. The light will toggle between high and low intensity without having to fully depress the switch. There is no doubt that predators are tuned in to odd sounds in the field. Having the ability to toggle intensities, without any audible clicks, is a big advantage.

Each light was subjected to a light spray from a garden hose for a few minutes to check the integrity of the water resistant seals. I did not find any evidence of moisture infiltrating the inside of the bezels or battery compartments. I also placed the lights in a freezer for an hour which had no ill effects on the activation of the lights using both the push button and pressure switch tail caps. Predator Hunter Outdoors claims approximately 4 hours of continuous run time with white LEDs, 3.5 hours with green, and 2 hours with red. I found this to be nearly spot on during my testing. There was some drop off in intensity as the charge neared depletion, but this window occurred very close to when the battery became fully discharged. The NightSnipe Headlamp utilizes two Lithium batteries. This, combined with the white LED that mine came with, resulted in close to 5 hours of high intensity white light for scanning. As with the gun mounted lights, most of the entire run time was brilliant illumination until full battery depletion neared.

There are many lines of thought on which color is best for scanning lights and which is best for gun or bow mounted lights. I prefer white light for scanning to pick up eyes and identify what I am looking at as soon as possible. Once I have a positive identification, I will keep the animal in the



edge of the light as it works its way into range before switching to a colored gun or bow mounted light to lessen the chances of the animal spooking. For these reasons, the NightSnipe Headlamp, which I used for scanning, was set up with the white LED. I elected to install green LEDs in both the NightSnipe and Razorback lights.

At the time of this writing, our predator hunting seasons were closed with the exception of coyotes, which are legal to hunt year round in Pennsylvania. I spent a considerable amount of time playing around with different mounting options and several nights in the field in a fruitless attempt to call in a late summer coyote. I wish I could say I was successful, but that is not the case. What I did gain with a good feel for the performance of the lights and accessories that Predator Hunter Outdoors has put together for the predator hunting enthusiast. I was easily able to identify deer out to about 240 yards with the NightSnipe Headlamp.

I did call in several raccoons on one set. Their masks gave them away when they hit a fence line at 190 yards. Picking up eye shine at rather long distances was borderline easy with all three lights. One of my sets occurred in a recently mowed hayfield that is close to 500 yards long. As soon as I turned on the NightSnipe headlamp, six pairs of eyes greeted me from the back corner. I alternately switched between the white NightSnipe headlamp and the bow mounted NightSnipe light with the green LED. Eye shine was instant with both lights. Once I was satisfied that they were deer, I switched to a fawn distress in my FOXPRO Shockwave. Two does made their way in to about 150 yards to investigate the round bale I was sitting against. I clicked on the bow mounted NightSnipe light on my Mission MXB and both deer were easy to identify through the Hawke scope. The beam of the NightSnipe is tuned for longer ranges compared to the Razorback, which is designed primarily for bow hunting. I found both lights easy to use on both of my crossbows, but the Razorback would get the nod for archery. It is plenty powerful enough for long range eye shine, yet provides a nice flood of light for close range shooting.

I look forward to pulling the trigger on a fox, bobcat, or coyote when our temperatures start to fall and the leaves begin to turn. Hopefully, by the time this issue is printed, I will have a few pelts hanging in the garage. I have no doubt that the Predator Hunter Outdoors NightSnipe systems will do their part if I do mine, and I look forward to spending much more time with them.

TAKE THE LEAP

For those looking to expand their hunting opportunities, I would not be hesitant to invest in the quality night hunting systems which Predator Hunter Outdoors is making available to the consumer. At the time of this writing, Predator Hunter Outdoors is exploring the option of manufacturing a system specifically designed for crossbow hunters. They certainly recognize the rapid growth in both crossbow and predator hunting and want to provide you with the best tools to make your hunts as successful as possible. Paul will personally work with you to design a custom kit specifically for your crossbow and predator hunting needs. I will always remember the first coyote and bobcat that I called in. That experience ranks right up there with my very first deer and my first bow killed deer. When my first coyote hit the ground several years ago, I thought I had reached the pinnacle of my hunting career. That may sound odd to some, but rest assured, predator hunting is as exciting and as challenging as it gets. To chase them with archery tackle, and to be successful at it, is just icing on the cake.

Please visit Predator Hunter Outdoors at www.predatorhunteroutdoors.com or email them at info@predatorhunteroutdoors.com to explore their entire product line or speak with them directly. At the top of their webpage it says- "Keep hunting after the sun goes down". After spending some time with their products, I look forward to the sun going down so I can light up the night with the NightSnipe lights.

