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DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOR IN FEMALE BIGHORN SHEEP

On 19 December 1965, Wilbur Wiles and I witnessed an attempt by a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) to catch a bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) lamb and subsequent defensive behavior by three mature bighorn ewes. These observations were made with the aid of a 7 × 35 binocular in mid-afternoon in the Big Creek drainage in the Idaho Primitive Area, Valley Co., Idaho.

A group of seven sheep, composed of two rams, three ewes, and two lambs, were sighted about 400 yards away on a sparsely-vegetated talus slope. All the sheep were bedded, with the exception of one ewe and one lamb. A third lamb, which had been apart from the others and obscured from view, suddenly ran toward the group from above, closely pursued by a large bobcat. The whole group bolted down the hill, easily outdistancing the cat. After running approximately 50 yards, the sheep stopped and turned around. The bobcat had ceased his chase and had turned back up the slope. The three ewes, all abreast, advanced up the slope toward the cat, followed at some distance by the rams and lambs. As they approached the retreating bobcat, their pace quickened, and the ewes closely pursued the obviously frightened cat approximately 20 yards before he escaped into a crevice. The ewes then returned to the lambs and rams, and the group moved unhurriedly about 200 yards to the west where they began to feed.—
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Bighorn Sheep
Maurice Hornocker