

# Cowrie SSH Honeypot Project

## Overview

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This project demonstrates the deployment of a Cowrie SSH honeypot on Ubuntu running in VMware. The honeypot was designed to simulate an exposed SSH server and capture attacker activity, including brute-force login attempts and command executions. The goal was to analyze attacker behavior, credentials used, and generate SOC-style reports to better understand real-world threats.

## Setup

Platform: VMware Workstation with Ubuntu VM

Honeypot Tool: Cowrie SSH Honeypot

Configuration:

Cowrie is installed and configured to emulate an SSH server

Default services are exposed to attract automated scanners and bots

Logging is enabled to capture attacker commands and failed logins

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## Objectives

Deploy a controlled honeypot to attract brute-force attempts

Capture attacker behavior, including login attempts and commands

Analyze credential patterns used by attackers

Generate SOC-style reports on observed malicious activity

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## Methodology

Deployment: Installed Cowrie on an Ubuntu VM and configured it to accept SSH connections.

Attack Simulation: Exposed the VM to simulate internet-facing access.

Data Collection: Cowrie logged all incoming SSH connections, login attempts, and commands.

Analysis: Parsed log files to extract:

Common usernames and passwords attempted

Frequency of brute-force login attempts

Attacker interaction with the honeypot shell

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## **Results**

Total SSH brute-force attempts recorded: 220+

Failed login events collected: 200+

Top credentials attempted:

root/123456

admin/password

test/test

Patterns observed:

Automated scripts attempting weak/default credentials

Attackers primarily targeting root/admin accounts

These findings demonstrate the constant nature of brute-force attacks on exposed SSH endpoints and emphasize the importance of strong authentication controls.

## **VM & Environment Setup**

```
sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade -y
```

```
sudo apt install git python3 python3-venv python3-pip libssl-dev libffi-dev build-essential  
virtualenv sshpass -y
```

## Cowrie Installation

```
git clone https://github.com/cowrie/cowrie.git
```

```
cd cowrie
```

```
python3 -m venv cowrie-env
```

```
source cowrie-env/bin/activate
```

```
pip install --upgrade pip
```

```
pip install -r requirements.txt
```

```
cp etc/cowrie.cfg.dist etc/cowrie.cfg
```

```
nano etc/cowrie.cfg # set listen_port = 2222
```

## Run Cowrie

```
bin/cowrie start
```

```
bin/cowrie stop
```

```
tail -f var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json
```

## Test Login (fake SSH session)

```
ssh root@localhost -p 2222
```

## Simulated Attack Loop (Brute Force) - Basic

```
for u in root admin test user; do
```

```
    for p in 123456 password admin qwerty letmein; do
```

```
        sshpass -p "$p" ssh -o StrictHostKeyChecking=no -p 2222 "$u"@localhost "exit"  
    2>/dev/null || true
```

```
    done
```

```
done
```

## Simulated Attack Loop (Brute Force)

```
for u in root admin test user dev; do

    for p in 123456 password admin qwerty letmein toor dragon shadow iloveyou default; do

        sshpass -p "$p" ssh -o StrictHostKeyChecking=no -p 2222 "$u"@localhost "exit"
    done
done
```

## View Logs

```
tail -f var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json

ls var/lib/cowrie/tty/
```

## Save Project for GitHub

```
mkdir -p ~/cowrie_honeypot_project/{logs,screenshots,docs}

cp ~/cowrie/var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json ~/cowrie_honeypot_project/logs/cowrie.json

cp -r ~/cowrie/var/lib/cowrie/tty ~/cowrie_honeypot_project/logs/tty_logs

head -n 100 ~/cowrie/var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json >
~/cowrie_honeypot_project/logs/cowrie_sample.json

nano ~/cowrie_honeypot_project/docs/setup_instructions.md

cd ~

tar -czvf cowrie_honeypot_project.tar.gz cowrie_honeypot_project
```

# SCREENSHOTS

```
(cowrie-env)(cowrie@kali)-[~/cowrie]
└─$ bin/cowrie status
cowrie is running (PID: 27568).

(cowrie-env)(cowrie@kali)-[~/cowrie]
└─$ tail -f var/log/cowrie/cowrie.log
2025-09-05T23:40:26.946452Z [HoneyPotSSHTransport,0,127.0.0.1] Command found:
exit
2025-09-05T23:40:26.947685Z [twisted.conch.ssh.session#info] exitCode: 0
2025-09-05T23:40:26.947780Z [cowrie.ssh.connection.CowrieSSHConnection#debug]
sending request b'exit-status'
2025-09-05T23:40:26.949351Z [HoneyPotSSHTransport,0,127.0.0.1] Closing TTY Lo
g: var/lib/cowrie/tty/4675fee665e9a1c7c0113ba53488d793ab1f06176d126aaff4158a9
f49ac4e30 after 174.6 seconds
2025-09-05T23:40:26.950154Z [cowrie.ssh.connection.CowrieSSHConnection#info]
sending close 0
2025-09-05T23:40:26.952263Z [cowrie.ssh.session.HoneyPotSSHSession#info] remo
te close
2025-09-05T23:40:26.952853Z [HoneyPotSSHTransport,0,127.0.0.1] Got remote err
or, code 11 reason: b'disconnected by user'
2025-09-05T23:40:26.954156Z [HoneyPotSSHTransport,0,127.0.0.1] avatar root lo
gging out
2025-09-05T23:40:26.954329Z [cowrie.ssh.transport.HoneyPotSSHTransport#info]
connection lost
2025-09-05T23:40:26.954407Z [HoneyPotSSHTransport,0,127.0.0.1] Connection los
t after 228.8 seconds
^C
```

```
(cowrie-env)(cowrie@kali)~[~/cowrie]
$ tail -f var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json
{"eventid":"cowrie.client.var","name":"LANG","value":"en_US.UTF-8","message":
"request_env: LANG=en_US.UTF-8","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:37
:32.335633Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.session.params","arch":"linux-x64-lsb","message":[],"senso
r":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:37:32.338094Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","ses
sion":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"ls","message":"CMD: ls","sensor":
"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:39:48.544752Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","sessio
n":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"pwd","message":"CMD: pwd","sensor"
:"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:39:54.742747Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","sessi
on":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"whoami","message":"CMD: whoami","s
ensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:39:59.090116Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1",
"session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"uname -a","message":"CMD: uname -a
","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:40:07.931489Z","src_ip":"127.0.0
.1","session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"cat /etc/passwd","message":"CMD: c
at /etc/passwd","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:40:14.773452Z","sr
c_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.command.input","input":"exit","message":"CMD: exit","senso
r":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:40:26.945911Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","ses
sion":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.log.closed","ttylog":"var/lib/cowrie/tty/4675fee665e9a1c7c
0113ba53488d793ab1f06176d126aaff4158a9f49ac4e30","size":1414,"shasum":"4675fe
e665e9a1c7c0113ba53488d793ab1f06176d126aaff4158a9f49ac4e30","duplicate":false
,"duration":"174.6","message":"Closing TTY Log: var/lib/cowrie/tty/4675fee665
e9a1c7c0113ba53488d793ab1f06176d126aaff4158a9f49ac4e30 after 174.6 seconds",
"sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:40:26.949351Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1",
"session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.session.closed","duration":"228.8","message":"Connection l
ost after 228.8 seconds","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:40:26.954
407Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"fcc6383c8c62"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.session.connect","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","src_port":37814,"ds
t_ip":"127.0.0.1","dst_port":2222,"session":"534c9871c0d3","protocol":"ssh","
message":"New connection: 127.0.0.1:37814 (127.0.0.1:2222) [session: 534c9871
c0d3]","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:45:57.074582Z"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.client.version","version":"SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8",
"message":"Remote SSH version: SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8","sensor":"k
ali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:45:57.089409Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session"
:"534c9871c0d3"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.client.kex","hassh":"eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356","ha
ssshAlgorithms":"mlkem768x25519-sha256,sntrup761x25519-sha512,sntrup761x25519-
sha512@openssh.com,curve25519-sha256,curve25519-sha256@libssh.org,ecdh-sha2-n
istp256,ecdh-sha2-nistp384,ecdh-sha2-nistp521,diffie-hellman-group-exchange-s
ha256,diffie-hellman-group16-sha512,diffie-hellman-group18-sha512,diffie-hell
man-group14-sha256,ext-info-c,kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com;chacha20-poly1305@
openssh.com,aes128-gcm@openssh.com,aes256-gcm@openssh.com,aes128-ctr,aes192-c
```

```
{
  "eventid": "cowrie.client.kex",
  "hassh": "eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356",
  "sshAlgorithms": "mlkem768x25519-sha256,sntrup761x25519-sha512,sntrup761x25519-sha512@openssh.com,curve25519-sha256,curve25519-sha256@libssh.org,ecdh-sha2-nistp256,ecdh-sha2-nistp384,ecdh-sha2-nistp521,diffie-hellman-group-exchange-sha256,diffie-hellman-group16-sha512,diffie-hellman-group18-sha512,diffie-hellman-group14-sha256,ext-info-c,kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com;chacha20-poly1305@openssh.com,aes128-gcm@openssh.com,aes256-gcm@openssh.com,aes128-ctr,aes192-ctr,aes256-ctr;umac-64-etm@openssh.com,umac-128-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-256-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-512-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha1-etm@openssh.com,umac-64@openssh.com,umac-128@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-256,hmac-sha2-512,hmac-sha1;none,zlib@openssh.com",
  "kexAlgs": ["mlkem768x25519-sha256", "sntrup761x25519-sha512", "sntrup761x25519-sha512@openssh.com", "curve25519-sha256", "curve25519-sha256@libssh.org", "ecdh-sha2-nistp256", "ecdh-sha2-nistp384", "ecdh-sha2-nistp521", "diffie-hellman-group-exchange-sha256", "diffie-hellman-group16-sha512", "diffie-hellman-group18-sha512", "diffie-hellman-group14-sha256", "ext-info-c", "kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com"],
  "keyAlgs": ["ssh-ed25519-cert-v01@openssh.com", "ecdsa-sha2-nistp256-cert-v01@openssh.com", "ecdsa-sha2-nistp521-cert-v01@openssh.com", "sk-ssh-ed25519-cert-v01@openssh.com", "sk-ecdsa-sha2-nistp256-cert-v01@openssh.com", "rsa-sha2-512-cert-v01@openssh.com", "rsa-sha2-256-cert-v01@openssh.com", "ssh-ed25519", "ecdsa-sha2-nistp256", "ecdsa-sha2-nistp384", "ecdsa-sha2-nistp521", "sk-ssh-ed25519@openssh.com", "sk-ecdsa-sha2-nistp256@openssh.com", "rsa-sha2-512", "rsa-sha2-256"],
  "encCS": ["chacha20-poly1305@openssh.com", "aes128-gcm@openssh.com", "aes256-gcm@openssh.com", "aes128-ctr", "aes192-ctr", "aes256-ctr"],
  "macCS": ["umac-64-etm@openssh.com", "umac-128-etm@openssh.com", "hmac-sha2-256-etm@openssh.com", "hmac-sha2-512-etm@openssh.com", "hmac-sha1-etm@openssh.com", "umac-64@openssh.com", "umac-128@openssh.com", "hmac-sha2-256", "hmac-sha2-512", "hmac-sha1"],
  "compCS": ["none", "zlib@openssh.com"],
  "langCS": [],
  "message": "SSH client hassh fingerprint: eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356",
  "sensor": "kali",
  "timestamp": "2025-09-05T23:48:28.912538Z",
  "src_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "session": "24af3ae912e8"
}

{
  "eventid": "cowrie.login.failed",
  "username": "root",
  "password": "123456",
  "message": "login attempt [root/123456] failed",
  "sensor": "kali",
  "timestamp": "2025-09-05T23:48:28.976393Z",
  "src_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "session": "24af3ae912e8"
}

{
  "eventid": "cowrie.session.closed",
  "duration": "1.1",
  "message": "Connection lost after 1.1 seconds",
  "sensor": "kali",
  "timestamp": "2025-09-05T23:48:29.983139Z",
  "src_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "session": "24af3ae912e8"
}

{
  "eventid": "cowrie.session.connect",
  "src_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "src_port": 54498,
  "dst_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "dst_port": 2222,
  "session": "c8ba001786e4",
  "protocol": "ssh",
  "message": "New connection: 127.0.0.1:54498 (127.0.0.1:2222) [session: c8ba001786e4]",
  "sensor": "kali",
  "timestamp": "2025-09-05T23:48:30.037817Z"
}

{
  "eventid": "cowrie.client.version",
  "version": "SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8",
  "message": "Remote SSH version: SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8",
  "sensor": "kali",
  "timestamp": "2025-09-05T23:48:30.051590Z",
  "src_ip": "127.0.0.1",
  "session": "c8ba001786e4"
}

{
  "eventid": "cowrie.client.kex",
  "hassh": "eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356",
  "sshAlgorithms": "mlkem768x25519-sha256,sntrup761x25519-sha512,sntrup761x25519-sha512@openssh.com,curve25519-sha256,curve25519-sha256@libssh.org,ecdh-sha2-nistp256,ecdh-sha2-nistp384,ecdh-sha2-nistp521,diffie-hellman-group-exchange-sha256,diffie-hellman-group16-sha512,diffie-hellman-group18-sha512,diffie-hellman-group14-sha256,ext-info-c,kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com;chacha20-poly1305@openssh.com,aes128-gcm@openssh.com,aes256-gcm@openssh.com,aes128-ctr,aes192-c
```



```
{"eventid":"cowrie.client.kex","hassh":"eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356","hasshAlgorithms":"mlkem768x25519-sha256,sntrup761x25519-sha512,sntrup761x25519-sha512@openssh.com,curve25519-sha256,curve25519-sha256@libssh.org,ecdh-sha2-nistp256,ecdh-sha2-nistp384,ecdh-sha2-nistp521,diffie-hellman-group-exchange-sha256,diffie-hellman-group16-sha512,diffie-hellman-group18-sha512,diffie-hellman-group14-sha256,ext-info-c,kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com;chacha20-poly1305@openssh.com,aes128-gcm@openssh.com,aes256-gcm@openssh.com,aes128-ctr,aes192-ctr,aes256-ctr;umac-64-etm@openssh.com,umac-128-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-256-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-512-etm@openssh.com,hmac-sha1-etm@openssh.com,umac-64@openssh.com,umac-128@openssh.com,hmac-sha2-256,hmac-sha2-512,hmac-sha1;none,zlib@openssh.com","kexAlgs":["mlkem768x25519-sha256","sntrup761x25519-sha512","sntrup761x25519-sha512@openssh.com","curve25519-sha256","curve25519-sha256@libssh.org","ecdh-sha2-nistp256","ecdh-sha2-nistp384","ecdh-sha2-nistp521","diffie-hellman-group-exchange-sha256","diffie-hellman-group16-sha512","diffie-hellman-group18-sha512","diffie-hellman-group14-sha256","ext-info-c","kex-strict-c-v00@openssh.com"],"keyAlgs":["ssh-ed25519-cert-v01@openssh.com","ecdsa-sha2-nistp256-cert-v01@openssh.com","ecdsa-sha2-nistp384-cert-v01@openssh.com","ecdsa-sha2-nistp521-cert-v01@openssh.com","sk-ssh-ed25519-cert-v01@openssh.com","sk-ecdsa-sha2-nistp256-cert-v01@openssh.com","rsa-sha2-512-cert-v01@openssh.com","rsa-sha2-256-cert-v01@openssh.com","ssh-ed25519","ecdsa-sha2-nistp256","ecdsa-sha2-nistp384","ecdsa-sha2-nistp521","sk-ssh-ed25519@openssh.com","sk-ecdsa-sha2-nistp256@openssh.com","rsa-sha2-512","rsa-sha2-256"],"encCS":["chacha20-poly1305@openssh.com","aes128-gcm@openssh.com","aes256-gcm@openssh.com","aes128-ctr","aes192-ctr","aes256-ctr"],"macCS":["umac-64-etm@openssh.com","umac-128-etm@openssh.com","hmac-sha2-256-etm@openssh.com","hmac-sha2-512-etm@openssh.com","hmac-sha1-etm@openssh.com","umac-64@openssh.com","umac-128@openssh.com","hmac-sha2-256","hmac-sha2-512","hmac-sha1"],"compCS":["none","zlib@openssh.com"],"langCS":[""],"message":"SSH client hassh fingerprint: eeca2460550b9ded084ecf2f70a75356","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:48:36.911265Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"69956072d6da"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.login.failed","username":"test","password":"123456","message":"login attempt [test/123456] failed","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:48:36.974284Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"69956072d6da"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.session.closed","duration":"1.1","message":"Connection lost after 1.1 seconds","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:48:37.987020Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"69956072d6da"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.session.connect","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","src_port":55216,"dst_ip":"127.0.0.1","dst_port":2222,"session":"d6dec814b0c6","protocol":"ssh","message":"New connection: 127.0.0.1:55216 (127.0.0.1:2222) [session: d6dec814b0c6]","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:48:38.038378Z"}
{"eventid":"cowrie.client.version","version":"SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8","message":"Remote SSH version: SSH-2.0-OpenSSH_10.0p2 Debian-8","sensor":"kali","timestamp":"2025-09-05T23:48:38.054073Z","src_ip":"127.0.0.1","session":"d6dec814b0c6"}
```



```
cowrie-env (cowrie@kali) ~$ cat /dev/null > /dev/null
$ tail -f var/log/cowrie/cowrie.json | tee -a /dev/null > /dev/null
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