

Take a Hike, Not a Life

From [Jim Robertson, C.A.S.H. Committee to Abolish Sport Hunting](#)

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Text and Wildlife Photography ©Jim Robertson

Living near prime wildlife habitat means that at any given moment you might witness the astounding sight of great Vs of migratory ducks or cackling Canada geese flying right overhead. If you're lucky, trumpeter swans might be among the waterfowl feeding and calling in the nearby estuary. And wood ducks or hooded mergansers might pay your inland pond a visit while searching for a quiet place to nest.

The downside of living near a natural wonderland? Being awakened Sunday morning at first light by the repeated volley of shotgun blasts, as though all-out war has been declared on all things avian (as is currently happening here this morning). The Elmers (hunters) out there (no doubt dressed in the latest expensive camo-pattern—a fashion statement apparently meant to impress the other Elmers out there) must be reveling in the fact that the dense morning fog allows them to “sneak” (in their loud outboard motor boats) up close enough to the flocks so that a large number of birds will end up dead, winged or otherwise wounded when they suddenly stand up and spray lead at all things avian or otherwise. Duck hunting is the ultimate betrayal. It happens well into the winter, long after just about any other hunting season is over, when the birds are congregated in flocks on their wintering grounds.



Photo © Jim Robertson

And it happens often on lands supposedly set aside as wildlife “refuges.” Pro-kill groups like Ducks Unlimited (DU—an appropriate acronym that looks like an abbreviation for “duh”) insist that they have the animals’ best interests in mind. But when it comes right down to it, all they really want to preserve land for is to have a playground for killing. (Just listen to them scream if you try to propose a refuge closed to hunting.)

The other day, after the constant blasting of shotguns earlier that morning, I heard and saw a lone goose calling mournfully for his or her lost mate. It is not a game or a sport for the birds—for geese and their advocates it’s nothing short of heartbreak.

As you might have assumed by now, I've thought about the issue of sport hunting a heck of a lot over the years and I've long-since declared myself a staunch anti-hunter. Not only am I anti-hunting, anti-trapping, anti-whaling and anti-sealing, I'm anti any form of bullying that goes on against the innocents—including humans. I am not an apologist for the wanton inhumanity of hunting in the name of sport, pseudo-subsistence or conservation-by-killing. In fact, I'm not a fan of any society that allows or encourages such atrocities.

Most sport hunters meanwhile must be anti-wildlife, anti-wilderness, anti-nature and anti-competition, since they're notoriously anti-cougar, anti-coyote and unquestionably anti-wolf. At the same time, they're pro-killing, pro-death, and when it comes right down to it, pro-animal cruelty.

In my book, *Exposing the Big Game: Living Targets of a Dying Sport*, I spend an entire chapter probing "Inside the Hunter's Mind." Hence, I'm here to tell you it's a dark and disturbing place in there—and no one divulges that better than the hunters themselves. Here are a couple of quotes from hunters waxing poetic on the thrills they get out of killing:

"I had wondered and worried how it would feel to kill an animal, and now I know. It feels — in both the modern and archaic senses — awesome. I'm flooded, overwhelmed, seized by interlocking feelings of euphoria and contrition, pride and humility, reverence and, yes, fear. The act of killing an innocent being feels — and will always feel — neither wholly wrong nor wholly right."

A sentiment perhaps once shared by this other unabashed killer:

"You're the last one there...you feel the last bit of breath leaving their body. You're looking into their eyes and basically, a person in that situation is God! You then possess them and they shall forever be a part of you. And the grounds where you killed them become sacred to you and you will always be drawn back to them."

Both quotes were from people who considered themselves hunters—men who stalked and killed innocent, unarmed victims. The first was taken from a *New York Times* article written by Bill Heavey, an editor at large for the "sportsman's" magazine, *Field and Stream*. The second one triumphantly reliving his conquest was none other than the infamous Ted Bundy, as he sat on death row musing over his many murders to the authors of *The Only Living Witness*.

It seems that, whether the perpetrator is engaged in a sport hunt or a serial kill, the approach is similar. Though their choice of victims differs, their mindset and/or perhaps mental illness is roughly the same. Even our former cold war enemy seems to be light years ahead of the U.S. in moving beyond the barbarity of hunting. Oleg Mikheyev, MP of the center-left Fair Russia parliamentary party, told the daily newspaper *Izvestia* just what I've been saying all along: "People who feel pleasure when they kill animals cannot be called normal."

Mikheyev entered a draft law to ban most hunting in Russia and expressed his belief that hunting is unnecessary and immoral, regardless of whether one sees it as a sport, a pastime or an industry. According to the bill, forest rangers will still be allowed to hunt but must first pass a psychological test, which Mikheyev points out, "...can help us in early detection of latent madmen and murderers." <https://www.rt.com/russia/ban-game-hunting-total-164/> .

Here in the states, Heavey went on to write, "What ran in the woods now sits on my plate... What I've done feels subversive, almost illicit."

Then why do it?

Though some hunters like Heavey may put on a show of innocuousness by temporarily eschewing guns and choosing to test their skill at bowhunting—arguably the cruelest kill method in the sportsman’s quiver—the typical American hunter sets out on their expeditions in a Humvee or some equally eco-inefficient full-sized pickup truck, spending enough on gas, gear, beer and groceries to buy a year’s supply of food, or to make a down payment on a piece of land big enough to grow a killer garden. Clearly the motive for their madness is more insidious than simply procuring a meal.

There’s been plenty of discussion about controlling weapons to hopefully stave off the next school shooting, but the media has been mute over the role hunting plays in conditioning people to killing. And the *New York Times* article is a shameful example of the press pandering to the 5 percent who still find pleasure in taking life. Do we really want to encourage 7.8 billion humans to go out and kill wildlife for food as if hunting is actually sustainable and wild animal flesh is an unlimited resource?

Overhunting has proven time and again to be the direct cause of extinction for untold species, including the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet and the Eastern elk. Meanwhile, hunters out west are doing a bang-up job of driving wolves back to the brink of oblivion for the second time in as many centuries. Heavey ended his *Times* article gloating, “I have stolen food. And it is good.” Like serial killers and school shooters, hunters objectify their victims; so insignificant are they to them that hunters don’t even recognize them for what they are—fellow sentient beings. Does somebody have to point out the obvious—he didn’t just steal “food,” he stole a life.



Photo © Jim Robertson

Most people are anthropocentric by nature and have little or no compassion for non-humans. To reach the average reader, the mainstream media tries to frame everything in the context of how it affects people. Keeping a record of hunting accidents may seem a rather morbid effort, but it’s a good way to remind the public about the lethal violence inherent in the “sport” of hunting. If a human doesn’t get maimed or killed once in a while, people continue to believe the misguided notion that hunting is just a friendly, social hour for traditional family-values proponents, “ethical” conservationists (claiming to be doing the animals a favor by killing them) or worse yet, those fashionable so-called locavore foodies who think of wildlife only as a source of flesh to stuff in their trendy, goateed, hipster gob.

Never mind that folks can get together in the out-of-doors to take a hike, watch birds or photograph wildlife—without taking any lives. No, hunting isn't going to end because of a high hunter body count. Not unless those who survive are willing to teach others to learn from their mistakes and encourage them to lay down their weapons once and for all.

Okay, so maybe there's sometimes more to sport hunting than just mindless plunking away at innocent, undeserving animals. Besides the selfish, sociopathic satisfaction they get out of snuffing out their fellow sentient beings, some hunters are also motivated by the prospect of eating the flesh of their conquests. These so-called "sportsmen" (or women) are not starving or suffering in any way (outside of being burdened with an abnormally low self-esteem) at the time they commit their offenses — they just have a hankering for something perversely pleasurable to them. Here's a description, in a hunter's own words, of how much he enjoyed consuming the flesh of a scarce, embattled trumpeter swan: "You would think it would be goosey, but it's more ducky, tight grained, very flavorful. The fat was delicious. I plucked it all the way to the chin and used the neck as a sausage skin." (From the article, "Utah hunters killed 20 rare trumpeter swans by accident this year. Here's why that matters.")

<https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2019/12/29/utah-hunters-killed-rare/>

Clearly, some of these sport-eaters fancy themselves gourmets and may even pride themselves in their abilities to turn a deceased carcass into a delectable feast, but the same could probably have been said about Jeffery Dahmer and his unfortunate victims.

And the fictional serial killer (based on an actual doctor incarcerated in Mexico), Hannibal Lecter displayed typical hunter-bravado when he bragged to FBI agent Clarice Starling: "A census taker once tried to test me. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice Chianti." Sorry to tell self-excusatory sportsmen and other unapologetic killers, murder does not magically become sacred once your victims' flesh passes through your digestive tract.

But, everyone has a right to feed themselves and their family, don't they? Well, does everyone—all of nearly 7.8 billion humans and counting—have the right to subsist off the backs of other animals when there are more humane and sustainable ways to feed ourselves? How many self-proclaimed "subsistence" hunters are willing to give up all their modern conveniences—their warm house, their car, their cable TV or their ever-present and attendant "reality" film crew—and live completely off the land like a Neanderthal? Not many, I'm sure—at least not indefinitely. That I can guarantee.



Photo © Jim Robertson

Deer, along with most other animal species—besides *Homo sapiens*, have built-in mechanisms that cause their reproduction rate to slow down when their population is high or food is scarce. Though state “game” departments are loath to share any information that might work against one of their arguments for selling hunting licenses, even *they* know that in reality the wildlife can ultimately take care of their own. According to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, “A mule deer herd that is at or above the carrying capacity of its habitat may produce fewer fawns than one that is below carrying capacity.” <https://docplayer.net/133460707-Of-nebraska-lincoln.html>

The fact is, hunting encourages ungulates to reproduce more, thus seemingly warranting the alleged need for population controls via, you guessed it, more hunting.

Hunting industry propagandists have a lot of people convinced that culling is a necessary evil for controlling animal overpopulation. Lethal removal is their one-size-fits-all solution, no matter the circumstance. But there are always alternatives to that fatal fallback position. When we finally get past the viewpoint of animals as objects, or “property of the state,” and start to see them instead as individuals, the justifications for culling begin to wear thin.

Many places that provide habitat for healthy populations of deer could also support the natural predators who evolved alongside them. All that’s required of humans is to stay out of the way and let nature take its course, or, in some cases, repair the damage they’ve done by reintroducing wolves or other native carnivores who were foolhardily eradicated. Yet, in the western US and Alaska, as well as in Canada, natural predators are *still* being killed to allow deer, moose or elk hunters a better chance of success. While some people complain that these browsers and grazers have gotten too tame, hunters in states like Idaho and Montana are whining that wolves make the elk too wild and thus harder for them to hunt. I tend to be even more cynical about areas where humans have claimed every square inch for themselves and aren’t willing to share with native grazers. When I hear grumbling about deer, elk or geese pooping on a golf course, I have a hard time relating to people’s grievances. It’s the height of speciesism to expect that these animals should face lethal culling for successfully adapting to an unnaturally overcrowded human world.

Ours is the invasive species, overpopulating and destroying habitats wherever we go. We wouldn't want some other beings jumping to a knee-jerk "cull them all" reaction every time humans reached *their* carrying capacity in a given area.

Sooner or later Mother Nature will tire of humans' destructive dominance and come up with a way to bring life back into balance. I can just hear her telling off the hunters: "Other animals have a right to be here too—just live with it, Elmers!"

Portions of this article were excerpted from the book, [Exposing the Big Game: Living Targets of a Dying Sport](#) by Jim Robertson.