Sport Hunting Is an Unnecessary Form of Cruelty to Animals

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In this viewpoint, the organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) presents its opinion that hunting is unnecessary and cruel to animals. PETA states that hunting causes animals pain, suffering, and stress as part of a sport that uses conservation as a shield. The authors offer humane alternatives to hunting for population control of animals. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is an animal rights organization that believes that animals have rights and deserve to have their best interests taken into consideration, regardless of whether they are useful to humans.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. On what public lands is hunting allowed, according to PETA?
2. How often are hunters unable to retrieve fatally wounded animals, according to PETA?
3. What does this viewpoint describe as some humane alternatives to hunting?

Although it was a crucial part of humans' survival 100,000 years ago, hunting is now nothing more than a violent form of recreation that the vast majority of hunters does not need for subsistence. Hunting has contributed to the extinction of animal species all over the world, including the Tasmanian tiger and the great auk.

Less than 5 percent of the U.S. population hunts, yet hunting is permitted in many wildlife refuges, national forests, state parks, and on other public lands. Forty percent of hunters slaughter and maim millions of animals on public land every year, and by some estimates, poachers kill just as many animals illegally.

Pain and Suffering

Many animals suffer prolonged, painful deaths when they are injured but not killed by hunters. A member of the Maine Bowhunters Alliance estimates that 50 percent of animals who are shot with crossbows are wounded but not killed. A study of 80 radio-collared white-tailed deer found that of the 22 deer who had been shot with "traditional archery equipment," 11 were wounded but not recovered by hunters. Twenty percent of foxes who have been wounded by hunters are shot again; 10 percent manage to escape, but "starvation is a likely fate" for them, according to one veterinarian. A South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks biologist estimates that more than 3 million wounded ducks go "unretrieved" every year. A British study of deer hunting found that 11 percent of deer who'd been killed by hunters died only after being shot two or more times and that some wounded deer suffered for more than 15 minutes before dying.

Hunting disrupts migration and hibernation patterns and destroys families. For animals like wolves, who mate for life and live in close-knit family units, hunting can devastate entire communities. The stress that hunted animals suffer—caused by fear and the inescapable loud noises and other commotion that hunters create—also severely
compromises their normal eating habits, making it hard for them to store the fat and energy that they need in order to survive the winter.

**Blood-Thirsty and Profit-Driven**

To attract more hunters (and their money), federal and state agencies implement programs—often called "wildlife management" or "conservation" programs—that are designed to boost the number of "game" species. These programs help to ensure that there are plenty of animals for hunters to kill and, consequently, plenty of revenue from the sale of hunting licenses.

Duck hunters in Louisiana persuaded the state wildlife agency to direct $100,000 a year toward "reduced predator impact," which involved trapping foxes and raccoons so that more duck eggs would hatch, giving hunters more birds to kill. The Ohio Division of Wildlife teamed up with a hunter-organized society to push for clear-cutting (i.e., decimating large tracts of trees) in Wayne National Forest in order to "produce habitat needed by ruffed grouse."

In Alaska, the Department of Fish and Game is trying to increase the number of moose for hunters by "controlling" the wolf and bear populations. Grizzlies and black bears have been moved hundreds of miles away from their homes; two were shot by hunters within two weeks of their relocation, and others have simply returned to their homes. Wolves have been slaughtered in order to "let the moose population rebound and provide a higher harvest for local hunters." In the early 1990s, a program designed to reduce the wolf population backfired when snares failed to kill victims quickly and photos of suffering wolves were seen by an outraged public.

**Nature Takes Care of Its Own**

The delicate balance of ecosystems ensures their own survival—if they are left unaltered. Natural predators help maintain this balance by killing only the sickest and weakest individuals. Hunters, however, kill any animal whom they would like to hang over the fireplace—including large, healthy animals who are needed to keep the population strong. Elephant poaching is believed to have increased the number of tuskless animals in Africa, and in Canada, hunting has caused bighorn sheep's horn size to fall by 25 percent in the last 40 years; *Nature* magazine reports that "the effect on the populations' genetics is probably deeper."

Even when unusual natural occurrences cause overpopulation, natural processes work to stabilize the group. Starvation and disease can be tragic, but they are nature's ways of ensuring that healthy, strong animals survive and maintain the strength level of the rest of their herd or group. Shooting an animal because he or she *might* starve or become sick is arbitrary and destructive.

"Sport" hunting not only jeopardizes nature's balance, it also exacerbates other problems. For example, the transfer of captive-bred deer and elk between states for the purpose of hunting is believed to have contributed to the epidemic spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD). As a result, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has given state wildlife agencies millions of dollars to "manage" deer and elk populations. The fatal neurological illness that affects these animals has been likened to mad cow disease, and while the USDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] claim that CWD has no relationship to any similar diseases that affect humans or farmed animals, the slaughter of deer and elk continues.
Another problem with hunting involves the introduction of exotic "game" animals who, if they're able to escape and thrive, pose a threat to native wildlife and established ecosystems. After a group of nonnative wild boars escaped from a private ranch and moved into the forests of Cambria County, Pa., the state of Pennsylvania drafted a bill prohibiting the importation of all exotic species of animals.

**Canned Cruelty**

Most hunting occurs on private land, where laws that protect wildlife are often inapplicable or difficult to enforce. On private lands that are set up as for-profit hunting reserves or game ranches, hunters can pay to kill native and exotic species in "canned hunts." These animals may be native to the area, raised elsewhere and brought in, or purchased from individuals who are trafficking in unwanted or surplus animals from zoos and circuses. They are hunted and killed for the sole purpose of providing hunters with a "trophy."

Canned hunts are becoming big business—there are an estimated 1,000 game preserves in the U.S. [Media mogul] Ted Turner, who owns more land than any other landowner in the country, operates 20 ranches, where hunters pay thousands of dollars to kill bison, deer, African antelopes, and turkeys.

Animals on canned-hunting ranches are often accustomed to humans and are usually unable to escape from the enclosures that they are confined to, which range in size from just a few yards to thousands of acres. Most of these ranches operate on a "no kill, no pay" policy, so it is in owners' best interests to ensure that clients get what they came for. Owners do this by offering guides who are familiar with animals' locations and habits, permitting the use of dogs, and supplying "feeding stations" that lure unsuspecting animals to food while hunters lie in wait.

Only a handful of states prohibit canned hunting, and there are no federal laws regulating the practice at this time. Congress is considering an amendment to the Captive Exotic Animal Protection Act that would prohibit the transfer, transportation, or possession of exotic animals "for entertainment or the collection of a trophy."

"**Accidental" Victims**

Hunting "accidents" destroy property and injure or kill horses, cows, dogs, cats, hikers, and other hunters. In 2006, Vice President Dick Cheney famously shot a friend while hunting quail on a canned-hunting preserve. According to the International Hunter Education Association, there are dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries attributed to hunting in the United States every year—and that number only includes incidents involving humans. It is an ongoing problem, and one warden explained that "hunters seem unfamiliar with their firearms and do not have enough respect for the damage they can do."

**A Humane Alternative**

There are 30 million deer in the U.S., and because hunting has been an ineffective method to "control" populations (one Pennsylvania hunter "manages" the population and attracts deer by clearing his 600-acre plot of wooded land and planting corn), some wildlife agencies are considering other management techniques. Several recent studies suggest that sterilization is an effective, long-term solution to overpopulation. A method called TNR (trap, neuter, and return) has been tried on deer in Ithaca, N.Y., and an experimental birth-control vaccine is being used on
female deer in Princeton, N.J. One Georgia study of 1,500 white-tailed deer on Cumberland Island concluded that "if females are captured, marked, and counted, sterilization reduces herd size, even at relatively low annual sterilization rates."

Further Readings

Books


Periodicals


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Gale Document Number: GALEIEJ3010504222