

Hunting's New Beginning

BY SHANE MAHONEY

Hunting, the way of life for human beings everywhere until recent times, has always been of societal interest. Hunting's profile is nothing new ... not at all. Hunters and non-hunters alike were always fascinated by its progress and drama, and always conflicted to some extent by their love of wild creatures and the reality of biological law; namely, that flesh eats flesh. Across widely varying environments, and under sometimes nearly impossible circumstances, mankind developed the one great pathway to existence that became the hallmark of our species. We were the greatest hunters the natural world had ever seen, and no other species could exemplify the range of our capacity, nor the limitlessness of our inventions. Eventually, even the greatest giants on the planet would be brought to our campfires, and our children would rise to strength and stature by their flesh and bone. Upon ocean and ice field, and from desert to high mountain, man the hunter secured his existence by the most eloquent equation ever derived: energy and matter are interchangeable. The flesh we secured became the flesh we were. The animal and man were thus truly inseparable. We would wait a long time indeed before someone would write this equation down! When he did, we revered him as perhaps the greatest physicist of all time. In reality he was just another hunter, running down the truth.

For ages, the pattern of human existence was the same. We hunted and gathered, and the nutritional wealth of the world fell before our relentless desire to survive. But it was not only the flesh of fruit or the blood of animals we sought; we were endlessly discovering the secrets of the natural world, and through patient study, coming to understand the place of all things in a great cycle of death and resurrection. Hunters were the first and greatest ecologists, the first philosophers and the first priests of knowledge. It was their collected wisdom, passed down through generation after generation that secured the lives of those who came after them, and it was to them that understandings of universal laws were first evident. They relied on the season's predictable turning to explain the flush and decay of life and the rising once more of nutritional bounty from lands locked beneath droughts or snows. Stars and moons told them when the great migratory herds would appear and how long they must wait for their return. They came to understand in the most emphatic way that the plains of lush grasses were transformed into animal offspring and that no break in this cycle could appear without a cascading effect. They bore witness to the indivisibility of life – for did not flowers grow in abundance where they butchered their kills?

So it was surely inevitable that art and spirituality would rise in the human species. Faced with a world of startling fullness, yet with existence a struggle for all, man was led to question, by the sheer force of nature's power and his own expanding capacity for reason, his origins and the purpose of his existence. Hunting cultures the world over developed rich mythologies centered upon the natural world and saw in the kill an element of the inevitable. It was inevitable that some should die so others would live. Inevitable too that man the hunter would ponder his own role in this endless



RICK WILLIAMSON

cycle. As his magnificent cave art so powerfully suggests, man ceased to instinctively participate in the kill and began his journey towards an intellectual and spiritual tie with both his hunting lifestyle and the creatures upon which he depended for survival. He was not the brute creature he had been. He was transformed and so was his participation in the hunt. It had gone from something that always was, to something that always had to be. Through the hunt, man had come to an understanding of the very nature of existence, and in so doing, had stepped somehow outside the rest of nature in a vital, conscious way. Biologically he was as constrained as ever, of course, but spiritually and intellectually he had crossed a point of no return. Man in nature and

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nature in man, the balance was becoming more complicated all the time. For all other carnivores the hunt was pursued without questions; for man it had become the source of his most profound wonderings.

Complicated it became, and complicated it remains. Hunting is under siege and the subject of debate the world over. It is clear that modern society no longer implicitly understands why hunters continue the practice. Society, while in the majority not opposed to hunting, certainly has outspoken minorities who wish to see it banned, and a growing number who wish to understand why it should continue. After all, it does involve the willful death of magnificent creatures. Is it necessary that this should continue in modern times, they ask? What useful purpose does hunting serve anyway? Why do people who do it seem to love it so much? Aren't they all just juvenile, brutish males who can't quite adjust to modern civilized practices? The list of questions is growing, and the arguments against hunting becoming more refined. The response by hunters however has been far from effective. We don't like to discuss this hunting business, at least not with non-hunters. We would rather just be left alone ... to hunt.

Answering these questions may not be an easy or desirable task, but let us make no mistake about it: hunters will either provide good answers or they will see their cherished opportunities to hunt withdrawn. No amount of effort will overcome the tidal force of concerted public opinion. The much overused buzz words of "hunter retention" and "hunter recruitment" will soon be rendered altogether useless, unless

hunters initiate new programs to reach the broad public who yet remain accepting of ethical, responsible and controlled hunting. We have wasted too much time worrying about those who are either clearly with us or clearly against. It is the wide majority in the middle we need to address. With them rests our future. Within them resides our common past. We have to explain, honestly and with confidence, the two elements of hunting that will decide its future, namely, "Why is hunting relevant?" and "Why do we hunt". The first will answer how the public benefits from having hunting around; the second will provide public observers the chance to assess hunters themselves. For remember, it is not only hunting that is under fire. So too are hunters. Both must be acceptable if the practice is to survive.

Hunters must rise to this new challenge. They must set aside jaded excuses for hunting and explain their true motivations, and they must be able to explain the conservation service that hunting provides. Only long term strategic efforts along these lines will save hunting. Hunters have to be blasted out of their comfort zones and become activists for the cause they cherish. They must become better organized, more articulate in their delivery and more knowledgeable in their arguments. This will take resources, careful planning and time, Knee-jerk reactions, no matter how impassioned, will not work. Hunters must see and feel the energy and opportunity for giving hunting its new beginning. Otherwise they can set their course for the sunset. Hunting will disappear, and in the end hunters will be responsible. It is not our opponents we need to fear, it is our own lack of commitment. The target is clear. We are hunting for our lives.

**Hunt
Forever**

SCI Intervenes in Arizona Game and Fish Lawsuit



On April 16, the Fund for Animals and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), together with other environmental groups,

filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, challenging an Arizona Department of Game and Fish (AZGF) study concerning a reintroduced population of native desert bighorn sheep.

The AZGF study is funded with Pittman Robertson dollars and intends to assess the impact of removal of 75 percent of the mountain lion population on the desert bighorn sheep reintroduction. Wildlife biologists have observed that mountain lions appear to find bighorn sheep particularly tasty. Predator control is a recognized wildlife management tool. Also included as part of this study are

capture and evaluation of the sheep's health by use of helicopters.

One of the significant points of this program is that the mountain lion population is being reduced exclusively through the use of sport hunters and not through game and fish personnel. The animal rights groups challenge the study on a number of fronts, including the failure of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service to prepare Environmental Impact Statements, the improper preparation of environmental assessments, the use of helicopters in a wilderness area and the improper application of Pittman Robertson funds.

This challenge follows on the heels of an adverse ruling last October by the U.S. District Court in Oregon relating to an elk/cougar study. The Oregon decision, which was obtained by the Sierra Club, was not appealed and, therefore, has limited the potential for setting precedent nationwide.

This new bighorn sheep case poses a greater threat to state programs throughout the country. An adverse ruling in a case filed in the District of Columbia could result in a flood of lawsuits filed in D.C. by environmental activists challenging the use of Pittman Robertson funds. Therefore, victory in the district could have staggering implications nationwide.

In response to this lawsuit, the Government Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee authorized Anna Seidman, litigation attorney, on behalf of SCI, to file a motion to intervene.

If SCI receives a favorable ruling, they will assist the Arizona Department of Fish and Game, together with other pro-hunter groups, in defending a valuable and necessary wildlife restoration program, proper use of Pittman Robertson funds and protection of sport hunting.