

MOUNT Hunter™

BC • NWT • YT

Fair chase... No fence



1 FOR THE BOOKS

Also featuring...

NEVER TOO OLD FOR YOUR FIRST HUNT

A GREAT GOAT

DISPLAY UNTIL
AUGUST 31, 2017

\$8.95



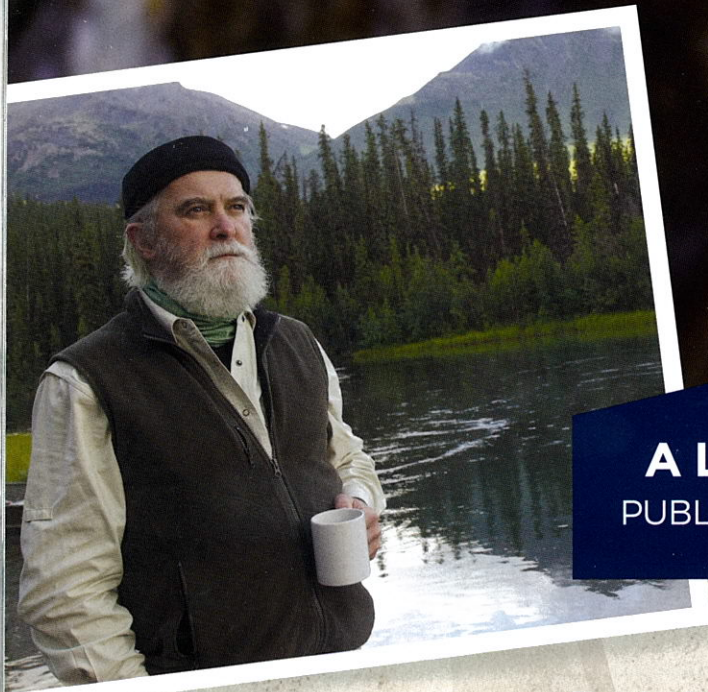
0 40232 26053 7

0 2

Vol. 28 | Issue 2

CONSERVATION MATTERS™

with Shane Mahoney



A LEAP OF FAITH FOR HUNTING: PUBLIC DISCOURSE OR PUBLIC DEATH - PART ONE

Thank you to Sports Afield for permission to reprint this article.

Shane Mahoney is considered to be one of the leading international authorities on wildlife conservation. A rare combination of historian, scientist, and philosopher, he brings a unique perspective to wildlife issues that has motivated and inspired audiences around the world. Named one of the 10 Most Influential Canadian Conservationists by Outdoor Canada Magazine and nominated for Person of the Year by Outdoor Life Magazine, he has received numerous awards including the Public Service Award of Excellence from the government of Newfoundland and Labrador and International Conservationist of the Year from Safari Club International. Born and raised in Newfoundland, he brings to his writings and lectures a profound commitment to rural societies and the sustainable use of natural resources, including fish and wildlife.

The island of Newfoundland stands resolutely separate from the North American continent, an ice sculptured marvel of erratic coastline, formidable granite escarpments, and stone beaches worn smooth and recalcitrant by a relentless sea. Inland, breathtaking barren land expanses and a frenzied pattern of braided streams, frigid fjord lakes and innumerable shallow ponds, gullies, and crystal clear rivers divert the eye constantly, each point of the compass delivering new vistas of shimmering blues and a mesmerizing kaleidoscope of seasonal colors set aflame in nearly constant breezes. Wildlife abounds on these landscapes, a bizarre list of arctic relics like rock ptarmigan and arctic hare and the more temperate such as black bear, moose, lynx, river otter, and red fox. The great bodied and heavy beamed woodland caribou roams the entire island, leaving the signs of his passing along forest trail, coastal headlands and all points in between.

In short, the island sparkles with life, an environment still largely pure and unsullied. Yet, this fullness is but a whisper compared with the writhing abundance of the offshore islands that millions of nesting seabirds call home. These small and numerous citadels lie like spawn around the coastline, ripe to bursting with the eggs, chicks, and adults that cram every inch of sod, rock and crevice from May through September. If one wishes to experience nature in all its gasping, wondrous, entrancing intensity, indeed in all its creative force and ferocious hardship and within the infinity of gentle birth and callous death, then these small cathedrals are where you should worship. For these places, as wild and wind torn as they are, provide an intensity of natural experience almost unsurpassable. Such experiences, duly witnessed and reflected upon can lead us to insights regarding our role in the universe and how we can best achieve the perpetuation of those wild others we rightfully honour and cherish.



Common Murres, known to Newfoundlanders as “Turrs,” are duck-sized black and white seabirds which nest in huge and dense colonies on many of these offshore islands. Long a source of meat for coastal residents, these birds have been hunted for centuries and still abound within spitting distances of many of our communities, a testimony to the sustainable use approach to wildlife conservation that has so effectively secured the future for most species hunted under regulatory and science-based programs. Turrs have several peculiar habits, among which is laying their single and fantastically coloured eggs on bare rock. They have completely forsaken all nest building. This achievement is even more remarkable given that they occupy tiny ledges of rock, often no more than six or eight inches wide and often hundreds or even thousands of feet above the water, and are packed onto this like a throng of tuxedo suited small men, growling, defecating, and jabbing with abandon. The noise and confusion on these ledges is almost unbelievable, as is the survival of the eggs which are incubated alternately by the male and female which are identical both in physical appearance and brooding inclination.

Part of this remarkable survival is explained by the fact that Turrs

have evolved a very sharply pointed egg which tends to spin rather than roll when dislodged. Only this prevents a complete loss of eggs over the abyss and into the sea – this and the assiduous care of the adult birds. For the three to four weeks of egg-laying and incubation these ledges are alive with tens or even hundreds of thousands of turrs crammed together in relentless proximity to one another, shoulders touching and single eggs held closely to their warm bellies. Night and day, through driving rain or snow and in warm sunshine and wild winds these birds jealously protect the one chance they have at reproduction. Below them, often far below them, the ocean dances to the surge of wind and tide, turning from crashing angry greys to the soft sparkling blues that mark the far ends of its endless pursuit of mood and appearance.

After about three weeks of care, the Turr eggs hatch. The small black and white chicks which emerge have spiking down feathers which give them the appearance of being shell-shocked. The big footed youngsters represent a new challenge for the parent birds. These mobile bundles of energy live in constant peril of falling from the ledges, being crushed by the throngs of adult birds, drowning in fetid pools of water and guano, or being killed by marauding gulls, ravens, or hawks. Furthermore, unlike many other seabird chicks which do nicely on regurgitated food, Turr youngsters like their fish fresh, requiring the parents to forage at sea and often at long distances from the nesting islands. In relay fashion one parent seeks dinner while the other protects and preens the growing youngster. Miraculously finding the specific and unmarked location on the ledge, the returning parent holds a single fish head-first down its throat with only the tail emerging from its bill. It will hold the fish there until the cartilaginous head

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

has been digested and then will present it to the chick. The fish will then be swallowed whole and the chick will rest until awakened by insatiable hunger once more. This seems a delightful existence, but it is predicated on a predictable environment, one where bait fishes are abundant close enough to the islands for the parents to retrieve and transport. As the bait fishes move off and the environment changes, new strategies are required.

For about another four weeks or so this pattern will continue, night and day, until the remarkable sea-going of the chicks takes place. In this species, the wings are used very effectively for swimming to considerable ocean depths in search of small fish and thus their length and shape have been quite modified, along these lines but not as far as in penguins. The small Turrs that have now reached four weeks of age are a fantastic combination of body parts that reflect both their immediate survival needs on the ledge and those that will suddenly emerge once they have left its relative safety and ventured upon the open sea. Their great feet provide stability on the ledge and will help paddle and steer the chick in the water, while their short stubby wings will be fine for swimming and pursuing fish. However, and this is surely the most incredible part of their young lives, they have not yet attained the power of flight when the time comes to leave the small ledge where up until now their entire lives have been spent.

It will be late evening when they decide to depart. Maybe a thousand feet below them, ocean surges will be crashing the fragmented rock skirts of their island and gulls will be soaring, raucously calling and waiting for things to turn in their favour. In the fading light of day, often in fog or heavy drizzle, the chicks, which until this time have hugged their rock face with such determination, will suddenly move and calling and bowing incessantly, approach its edge. They will hear their parents calling, swimming back and forth in the grey and white surges below, throwing their heads back over their shoulders and exposing their yellow-orange palettes, neon flashes to guide the chick onward. The ledges will come alive with noise

and aggression and a cacophony of sound will accompany the miraculous vaulting of these small land lubbers, about to become seafarers not in some slow apprenticeship but all at once, from off the rock and into the turbulent air. They will extend their large feet like parachutes and beat their tiny wings like mad, breaking their fall to the great ocean below.

Many will die, of course, beaten senseless on the rocks, crushed by their first ocean surge or eaten by predatory gulls and others. But most will survive, bobbing to the surface and swimming outward into the gathering darkness, to a new existence, accompanied by one parent and the certainty that inevitable change has occurred. Creatures which had only known land will not touch it again for at least four years. But when they do return, they will be part of yet another transition, taking their places as egg layers and providers so that Turrs may always gather along the coasts of Newfoundland and find their way to our islands, making all of our lives so much richer in turn. For this to occur, one great leap of faith will remain forever the essential odyssey, the great unapproachable conquered and put behind. No matter how long the chicks might persist in the comfort of their ledge existence, there is indeed no future unless they leave it behind.

Hunting is one of the few great departures from an otherwise predictable and suffocating world. Incredibly, it is in the possibility of the animal's death that we come to treasure the absolute necessity of their future lives. This complexity will forever ensure that opposition to hunting will always be with us. We know we are in decline and we know that we must do something more than we are to keep this incredible reality, known as hunting, alive. All else is lies and self-deception. Our safe ledges from which we look down on the uncertainty of public discourse, can keep us for only a little longer. Social, economic and ecological realities leave us absolutely no choice. We either convince our fellow citizens of hunting's modern relevance and value, or we will perish in our high cathedrals, left to die in a changing environment that could be conquered only by confidence in ourselves and a great leap of faith.

The Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia (GOABC) wishes to create a fundamental shift among hunters from caring about hunting to caring about all wildlife. Ranchers care about cattle and anglers care about fish, but hunters are concerned for all animals and their well-being. Hunters must be committed to the responsible use of wildlife resources and passionate about preserving a diversity of wildlife species. The GOABC is a strong supporter of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which stipulates that law and science should manage wildlife. This model is the result of hunters and anglers who were dedicated to conservation. As anti-hunting pressure becomes louder, it becomes increasingly important to continue and enhance the legacy of the hunter-conservationist.