Why I Do Not Hunt

Devereux Kutcher

1963

EVERY YEAR more people recognize that it is morally wrong to kill wildlife for "sport." Progress in this direction is slow, because shooting is not a spectator sport and few but those who participate realize the cruelty and destruction it involves.

The gunning fraternity, however, grows rapidly. Boss too young to develop proper conclusions through independent thought are taken afield by their gunning fathers; are subjected to advertisements of the arms manufacturers who describe shooting as wholesome and manly, and gun-toting as able to put redder blood in the veins; are enticed by gunner magazines with lurid stories glorifying the chase anil the kill, and in school by motion pictures purportedly to teach youngsters how to handle firearms safely, but designed to stimulate a desire to own a gun.

Wildlife is vanishing because of shooting and because of the loss of wild land habitat. Habitat loss will continue with our increasing population; but can we slow the shooting loss of wildlife? If the plight of our waterfowl is an indication, the chances seem slim.

Wildlife lickings to everyone, and not to the gunners alone. The only answer, then, is lor informed people everywhere to bring the truth about sport shooting to the great majority, who do not shoot, but who condone it because they know little or nothing about it.

What we most need is a new attitude toward the wild creatures. It is lime to realize that the harmless, innocent, beautiful birds and mammals have the same right to life as we; that there is nothing sporting or fair about a man armed with rifle, shotgun or bow ambushing an unsuspecting creature, then blazing away at it. The gunner likes to describe his violent pastime as character-building; but we know that to deliberately wound an animal and watch it go through the agony of dying can have no beneficial effect on anyone. A person hardened to this experience inevitably loses respect for life. If, as the gunners would have you believe, gun-toting and killing improve human morals, then perhaps we should encourage war. But who would dare say that war would not diminish, if a generation or two were to grow up knowing only the pleasures of observing wildlife instead of the imagined pleasures of killing it?

The gunner himself offers evidence of the wrong inherent in his amusement, and no one knows belter than he the weakness of his position w hen faced with the opinions of the non-gunner. Sensitive to criticism, he often becomes belligerent in his attempt to justify the fanatical idea that there is fun in destroying life. Sometimes he borders on the ridiculous, as w hen he tells you that if you stop eating beef, he will stop shooting, as though there were any similarity between killing wildlife for fun and raising livestock for food. Livestock is in no danger of becoming extinct, and slaughter, regulated by humane laws, does not make sport of the lives of the animals.

The gunner will tell you that he kills because he needs meat, yet for less money and effort, he can obtain meat at his nearby grocery . To kill is to obey a primitive instinct, he says, yet we know that tor countless centuries civilization has worked to rise above cave man tendencies, (dinning, he will tell you. gives him an excuse to go outdoors and tramp the woods and fields. But why destroy the most interesting feature of the woods and fields the wildlife — and deprive others of enjoying it? If he needs

an excuse to go out. a camera or binoculars weigh less than a gun. The practicing shooter would do well to discover that observing a wild creative unafraid in its natural environment is the greatest pleasure wildlife affords. When such rewards are to be had. what satisfaction can a man get from reducing a beautiful creature to a bloody mess of fur or feathers?

Unwittingly, the gunner sometimes turns to the Bible to justify his actions. He will remind you that God gave man dominion over the earth and its creatures. He misinterprets the reference, (Genesis 1:26. It does not imply that man has a divine right to take the lives of creatures for amusement, but rather to assume stewardship over them — not to use them as living targets, but to protect them for the sheer pleasure of seeing them and having them around.

There are times when killing is justified: To collect for natural history museums; to save oneself from attack; to prevent starvation in the wilderness, and to take the individual coyote that may be harassing the sheep rancher's Hocks, or the individual hawk that may have acquired a taste for chickens. But this remorseful job should give pleasure to no one.

What motivates the gunner? Perhaps killing a creature bolsters a downtrodden ego or eases a sense of inferiority; perhaps a man would feel left out if he could not describe his gunning exploits to his contemporaries, or perhaps he wants to demonstrate his marksmanship; but none of these reasons justifies forcing an animal to pay with its life. There are many ways to achieve these objectives, just as there are many wholesome, constructive ways to enjoy the outdoors, without ending the lives of the interest.ng. useful creatures that make their homes there.

The Ted K Archive

Devereux Kutcher
Why I Do Not Hunt
1963

National Wildlife magazine, August-September 1963, Vol 1, Iss 5.

www.thetedkarchive.com