

The Hunter's Role in Biodiversity

THROUGH THIS COLUMN, EFFORT IS MADE TO ACQUAINT BOONE AND CROCKETT ASSOCIATES WITH NATIONAL POLICIES, ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS AND LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS THAT POTENTIALLY WOULD IMPACT THEIR WILDLIFE AND HUNTING INTEREST. IT IS UNKNOWN, OF COURSE, HOW MANY READERS MAY ACT ON THE INFORMATION GIVEN, BUT IT IS HOPED THAT THESE BRIEF WRITINGS BROADEN READERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENTS THAT MAY AFFECT WILDLIFE AND HUNTING. IT IS HOPED, TOO, THAT THE READERS' INTEREST EMBRACES BOTH WILDLIFE AND HUNTING.

It would be a shame, for instance, if a readers' interest is in wildlife alone – that is, exclusive of hunting – because without hunting there would not be sufficient public interest nationally to adequately finance work necessary to perpetuate work for other than a few major species.

In truth, purchasers of hunting licenses, permits, stamps and all the rest pay the bulk of the bills for managing and maintaining wildlife at state and federal levels. Critics who seek to compare hunters' financial support for wildlife programs with that of the general public's, overlook the simple fact that hunters are taxpayers, too. So hunters kick money into the collection plate two times. Without their ante there would be fewer wildlife, both in number and species. Recall that it wasn't until licensing, etc. was imposed and money raised for the specific purpose that management programs were put in place to help wildlife recover from the wasteful actions of our exploiting forefathers.

It would be a shame, too, if an Associate's interest is solely in hunting, because without wildlife of many kinds a trip into the bush could be a dreary affair. Imagine having no birds flitting about as you labor up a rock-strewn slope in quest of deer or elk. Or rock chucks bouncing into a tangle of brush. Or having a gray jay perch on the antlers of your deer or elk while you field dress it. Or a raven wait noisily for you to leave the end-of-the-hunt scene so

that it, too, might enjoy the fruits of nature. Or the chipmunk that hustles off with food scraps from your campsite.

All of those features, that have a part in the hunt, factor into a widely misunderstood term — biodiversity, which is the sum total mix of all living things, animal and plant, in the hunter's universe. The more species of plants and the more species of animals, the more interesting and complex the biodiversity. And the more complex the biodiversity the more magnificent the overall natural scene in which hunters get to play out their sport. It compares to a play with all of the characters in place.

To those lacking understanding, biodiversity and rare and endangered species frequently provoke sharp criticism or simply a shrug of the shoulders. Why all the concern, they seem to say?

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fooling around with that stuff may cost jobs and undercut the local economy. That's sometimes true, but it is not invariably the case. It doesn't mean that the way things are done today is the right or most beneficial way in the long term.

Up until only a few years ago, loggers regarded the Pacific yew as a trash tree — knock it down and get it out of the way so we can get to the trees that have economic value. That is, until research divulged that the yew's

bark contains taxol, a material prized in the treatment of breast cancer. Effort is now made to protect the conifer so that it might continue to serve man's benefit, medically and economically. We are talking here about the health of mothers, wives, sisters and friends. Who has the knowledge to say that there aren't other plants or animals out there that have a role in man's environment?

Somewhere between one-half and three-quarters of all “pharmaceuticals have a biological, primarily plant, origin,” notes Thomas E. Lovejoy, assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in a recent issue of *Nature Conservancy*. Animal species, too, have contributed alike to mankind's well-being.

Why should man deliberately ignore or sacrifice any living plant or animal, when there is so much that even the best informed individuals do not understand about them, how they fit into this huge web of planetary life? So even though an individual may not fully understand or even care to understand the rudiments of biological diversity and rare and endangered species it is a good policy, by far, not to reject them out-of-hand. To do otherwise would be to suggest that one cares only for the immediate present and for him or herself.

Hunters who may wish to broaden their understanding of the outdoor world and thereby gain a better feel, perhaps, for the interconnection of plant and animal life, might purchase copies of *A Guide To Field Identification/Birds Of North America* and *A Guide To Field Identification/Trees Of North America*. Both are published by Golden Press, are authoritative, well illustrated, inexpensive, available in soft, water-resistant covers, and are stocked by most bookstores. They fit easily into your backpack or saddlebag and are great for whiling away the down-time of hunting while improving one's understanding of the natural world that a hunter should so much enjoy and understand.



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