

THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

Now that's just too far . . .



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The hunt at its most fundamental level is defined in and by the relationship between man and beast . . . between predator and prey. There is an intrinsic, irrefutable and intimate connection that cannot be compromised if we are to maintain

the sanctity of this relationship and the integrity of the hunt. We are justified in our pursuits by the existence of this bond and we are driven by the need to sustain and conserve our quarry and the wild places where it thrives so that we can practice our art, and assert our place in the circle of life. We derive our hunting ethics by measuring our choices against this relationship.

However, there are two forces at work that would affect this simple truth and diminish the very essence of the hunt—ego and technology. These two forces in concert with the philosophy, “the ends justify the means,” and the new mantra, “I simply do not have enough time,” are the justification for people to reinvent what we know to be the truth. This increasingly common mindset is at the heart of several scenarios that we need to work against.

The subject of this article is one of those scenarios—extreme long-range shooting/hunting. For the purposes of this discussion, we will refer to it as shooting rather than hunting. At first blush, this may seem like a slippery slope; however, this discussion will not attempt to narrowly define what is and what is not too far. The variables are far too numerous and the point will be lost in the process. To keep it simple for this discussion, let's call it shots over 900 yards!

The issue here is the emergence of a group of enthusiasts that intend and regularly plan situations where they take game animals at extreme distances for the sake of the shot, not the pursuit. This is not a matter of last resort or unfortunate circumstance; it is their intent when they go afield.

This phenomenon has made its way into the media in a big way over the last few years. This is understandable as it is very intriguing to watch. Additionally, it requires

animal, and therefore, there is no hunt. You could be sitting in a bar with music, conversation, and a rifle on the rail overlooking the mountains and have a similar opportunity.

There is a point where it is just really impressive target shooting. When we get to this point, we have taken advantage of the prey animal and lessened its importance and relevance in our hunting culture. Much the same as the interplay of ego and technology in the creation of the genetic caricatures of our wild populations which relegates the animals to the status of livestock, this shift is away from hunting and into something else entirely. These folks are not breaking any laws. They are very well-informed and equipped. They are remarkable marksmen. But they have forsaken one of the primary defining aspects of the hunt, and in doing so, they have demeaned and lessened the prey and strayed into an activity that no longer honors the animal or the hunt.

The other problem is that those intent on eliminating hunting see long-range shooters as the quintessential hunter. They are not one of us, even though the participants are out in wild places, wearing camouflage, toting well-built rifles and generally knowledgeable of the big game animals they are after. For all intents and purposes, they look like hunters. More to the point, they call themselves hunters, and their audience likely does not see them otherwise. This is where it becomes our concern. We do not want, nor deserve, to be characterized or defined by this group that looks so much like us but is not. We must assert and proclaim the difference. The discussion that should be had is not about splitting hairs or the mindless and endless consideration of how far is too far. The point is that we are in a relationship with the regal beasts we pursue, and this relationship is based on our respect, honor and love of the animals. This activity falls outside the parameters of this simple truth. ■

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discipline, practice and knowledge, which is quite impressive. Therefore, this is not an indictment of the skill or technology. Further, these folks can and do make the shot quite regularly, so it is not simply a matter of increasing the possibility of wounding the animal. The issue here is that long-distance shooting is not hunting. It is something else.

The relationship between predator and prey is severely compromised—even eliminated altogether. What distinguishes this activity from hunting is that the shooters are outside the limits of the animal's ability to even discern their presence. Different from blind-hunting or a well-executed stalk where the hunter eludes detection, at 900 yards there is no chance of detection. There is no pursuit. There is no connection with the