

Evolution

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It is black and white. There is an extensive set of skills necessary to be an effective, skilled, and accomplished hunter. These skills range from mastery of the chosen method of hunting, habitat evaluation, wildlife science, even survival skills. So it goes in life, it is in hunting. First we learn to crawl, then walk, and ultimately run. Part of life is teaching others to do so as well.

Many authors have reviewed the developmental stages of the hunter. We will do so again within this text. The reason—each individual hunter must develop insight into his own level of sophistication to continue to move forward. One's developmental stage sets the tone for understanding the significance of the actions and decisions. Grasping the Boone and Crockett Club's concepts of ethical hunting and fair chase is elusive when self-analysis is lacking. As you will see, the "complete" hunter has made an important transition to connoisseur, mentor, contributor, and servant leader. In recognizing our role in the outdoor world as that of a participant and steward (versus the revolutionary point), we move beyond our narcissism born of immaturity.



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There is an extensive set of skills necessary to be an effective, skilled, and accomplished hunter. These skills range from mastery of the chosen weapon, habitat evaluation, wildlife science, even survival skills.

It is important to note that hunters enter and travel these stages quite differently. Additionally, many folks experience a developmental arrest and are unable to climb all rungs of the ladder. This fact is extremely critical for several reasons. Most important, it guides and explains their thought processes and decision making as they hunt or begin investing in shortcuts to circumvent the arduous path to success.

The "novice" steps into a new world, full of never-before-experienced sensations and stimuli. These encounters begin to pique their interest. While afield, their experiences are frequently in the past tense as their outdoor skills remain too rudimentary to take advantage of the opportunities at hand. Be it the crash of brush followed by

a snort and flash of an escaping whitetail or the chaotic burst of an underfoot covey of bobwhites, the novice's appetite is whetted. There is an awakening awareness of the skills needed for success, and so begins the journey of development. Identification is location specific and species specific.

The novice is frequently brought to the arena by a mentor. The mentor is most typically assuming this role having successfully navigated at least to the "advanced" stage. They typically represent the "complete" hunter. As such, they are the backbone of the furtherance of our hunting culture. Therefore, it is mandatory that they grasp our concepts of ethics and fair chase. The mentor has historically been a family member. With the unfortunate degradation

of the family structure in North America coupled with our urbanization, complete hunters and strategists have identified the need for entry-level access to hunting. This has facilitated the pairing of mentors with novice hunters. While coming together as strangers, lifetime bonds and friendships are formed. Both are rewarded greatly. With mentoring and additional time spent afield, the novice advances to the "intermediate" stage. This stage is marked by a further advancement of skill level as well as the realization of the supreme difficulty of transitioning these skills from concept to implementation. Tight groups on the bench rest at the local range or arrows piercing the bull at 30 to 40 yards from a compound bow tuned by the outdoor store pro become irregularly irregular when taken on the hunt, driven by haste and the unsteadiness of adrenaline.

In today's marketing climate, the intermediate hunter faces a new crossroads. Does one dedicate the time to continued skill development or fast forward technologically? Clearly, we are seeing fewer hunters master skills such as judging distances, building and tuning rifles, bows, etc., reading sign, and orienteering. Rather, hunters today tend to be judged by the sophistication of their gear from lasers to eccentric cams. These obstacles move the intermediate into one of three directions:

Stagnancy: This is marked by a division from nature and its fulfilling nuances.

Remission: This is failure to master the requisite skills, leading to an exodus from the sport.

Advancement: This is delineated by a continued quest for success and a polishing of one's skill set development or technological dependence.

Ultimately, the progressive intermediate begins to experience success from an aesthetic standpoint and/or a harvest standpoint. Intermediates develop the trait that either moves them closer to their quarry (primitive weapons) or contentment of the taking of game from a distance, placing a premium on ballistics and a global view of their hunting environment. The hunter's mind begins to wander toward additional species, varying habitats and the mystic and wonderment they possess.

The "advanced" hunter is born, committed to and passionate towards the chase. They possess the knowledge, the skills, and the access that regularly leads to a filled tag. Initially, it is the harvest,

repetitively, that defines their prowess in introspection. The quantity and rapidity of their harvest serves as a source of pride also. They develop strong, defensible opinions in regard to timing and technique, and relish the debate. They are the consummate "predator."

Advanced hunters branch into a complicated array of directions. From this branching is born many of our outfitters, guides, and professional hunters. Interestingly, many of our wildlife biologists and professional conservationists are born from the intermediate stage secondary to their predisposition for the earth and the intricacies of its wildlife and habitat interrelationships.

With the passage of time and the processing of life's experiences, a select few graduate to wear the mantle of the "complete" hunter. These folks have been through the battles and fought the wars of life and the experiences of hunting. They understand the gifts of nature. There is an appreciation of our natural resources and their delicacy. The pleasures given them afield beckons a need from within for repayment. The complete hunter's quest for the take subsides. There are self-imposed restrictions added to the hunt (rifle to bow, compound to longbow, the quest for a


mature trophy) aimed at shifting the advantage further to the quarry. This is done to enhance quality time afield and deepen the sense of accomplishment.

The complete hunter fosters stewardship. He understands that quality wildlife is the product of quality habitat. Private land ownership or project involvement via species-specific conservation organizations provides an outlet for the new land steward.

The complete hunter contributes as a servant leader. Again, our conservation organizations are the vehicle by which complete hunters administrate, oversee, politic, and provide in-field efforts to further the many diversified causes of the hunter-conservationist.

Insight to one's position on this continuum of evolution is paramount for each of us to progress. As we progress, we will look to reanalyze our long-developed skill sets to reconnect with nature. As we do so, hunting as an accepted part of our modern day society is honored and hope of acceptance by the non-hunting public is elevated. Saxton Pope, a preeminent hunter-conservationist of the 19th and 20th Centuries, stated this concept eloquently, "The true (complete) hunter counts his achievement in proportion to the effort involved and the fairness of the sport." ■



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