

THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

By Daniel A. Pedrotti Jr.
B&C REGULAR MEMBER

CHAIR
Hunter Ethics
Sub-Committee



Mea Culpa my hind leg . . .

Apparently to one or two of you, exposing my exceptional broadmindedness in the last issue sounded like crawfishing or apologizing. For that, I am sorry. I assure you it was neither.

You see, I was raised to be accountable for my words and deeds. I did not grow up in the apology/excuse culture that is so prevalent these days. I was not allowed to explain or apologize away the consequences, and I would not try to do so with you. I stand by what I said before, in my previous columns, and I promise to continue on the same path. What I hadn't adequately addressed was proper context for our discussion. The proper perspective is best illustrated with the simple idea that "it is better that we hunt, in whatever form our circumstance dictates, than that we don't."

Here's the big broad line between that idea and what is wrong these days: money and influence are being used to diminish the hunt equation. You should never be too busy or too fancy to approach the hunt in its purest form. None of us is above the rigors, the uncertainty or the wondrous, myriad details that work against us in our pursuits, and you shouldn't want to be. And, don't bring your pictures when you do.

Fair chase is an ideal, which is also the fundamental criterion for entry into our records book. It is what we see as the best approach and most consistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. It basically requires you to expose yourself to everything that can go wrong. That is what makes it such a high standard and why there are such bragging rights in it.

If you can't measure your hunt in these ideal terms, we are not saying you—nor anyone else—shouldn't hunt. The primary differentiator on the good hunt/bad hunt continuum is intent. My brother helped me see that we can still establish and protect the ideals of fair chase while we accept that sometimes folks simply don't have the opportunity or means to hunt this way. However, when you intend to use your financial capability to make it easier, more certain or bigger, you are not only cheapening the experience, you are setting an example that can and will be used against the hunting community.

I am not taking the capitalist to task, nor will I ever vilify the free enterprise system (as it was meant to be). I believe in it in the marrow of my bones. Consequently, I have worked hard all of my adult life. I do not believe that just because I work hard, I will be successful. On the other hand, I know that if I don't work hard, I most certainly won't achieve success. Hunting is supposed to be like this too.

This said, the reward of a job well-done does not always come in the form we expected. Most often, our reward for a hearty effort afield is just the memories and a little introspection. For me, this will suffice. I chalk it up to experience but never regret that I was out there engaged in what I love, exercising my God-given and field-acquired hunting skills, and I reveled in it. I was not flawless, and I learned a few new things about the hunt, the prey and myself. I do not come back empty-handed by a long shot. I am enriched. Once recharged, I will go at it again with the same gusto.

So where does this leave us? What I intend to provide is thought-provoking "ideal speak" from which we can each and collectively reconsider where we want to stand as a community. I submit that when one goes afield, he or she becomes an active part of the equation (a variable) and he/she willingly accepts the balance of the equation as rigid and uncompromising and at the same time wonderfully unpredictable. Those that would participate in a situation where the hunt equation is shortened, sweetened or contrived need to carefully reflect on what hunting really is and what it is not. When the money/ego motive trumps the North American Model, the profiteer is nothing more than a twisted reincarnation of Roosevelt's reprehensible market hunter—and what may look like a hunt, ain't a hunt—*caveat emptor*. ■

