

BOWHUNTING ETHICS

PERSPECTIVES FROM AN AFRICAN BOWHUNTING OUTFITTER

By Willem Frost

Much has already been said and written about hunting ethics. Man has hunted since time immemorial. He hunted in order to defend himself and to feed himself. Since those days man has altered his environment to such an extent that it is no longer necessary to hunt in order to keep body and soul together. Twenty first century man developed a modern set of values and in the Western civilization the practice of hunting is increasingly questioned by animal rights activists in particular. Therefore questions around ethics keep surfacing in the minds of hunters. Also bowhunters.

It is extremely difficult to define or legislate hunting ethics, but one can accept that behavior, attitude, values and principles must be playing an important part.

The modern sport hunter is no longer hunting for his survival. Primitive man's survival depended on his hunting skills, and therefore some of his hunting practices are acceptable. The 21st century hunter is hunting for the pleasure of it, to collect trophies and/or meat (usually to add a healthy variety to the meat he is buying from his butcher), and to enjoy the totality of the hunting experience.

The circumstance under which the hunt takes place often determines the behavior of the hunter. This has to do with the topography and the hunting methods that have been developed over time. Hunting for bongo in Cameroon and hunting for caribou in Canada are two totally different propositions and the methods will be radically different

Hunting is not a competition for the most or largest animals. Nor is it a spectator sport; the hunter is often on his own with only his internal convictions and conscience to guard over his behavior.

It is not possible for man to compete with wild animals in the hunting field. Animals' senses are too far developed beyond that of man, who has to rely on his superior intellect and technology to compete out in the wilds. In order for man to collect the trophies he desire, he has to invest in equipment (i.e. rifles, scopes, ammunition, bows, clothing, etc.) that will enable him to succeed. So, to an extent a hunter may be able to "buy" his trophy by investing in the best available equipment. But even if the hunter possesses a lot of experience, knowledge and equipment, luck will still play a major role in any hunt.

Hunting is undoubtedly a legitimate and sensible form of sustainable utilization of our natural resources.

So, having said all this, what should appropriate behavior in the hunting field be? The following are considered important aspects of ethical hunting.

FAIR CHASE

Ethical hunters only hunt in the spirit of fair chase. This means that the animal should have *inclination* as well as the *opportunity* to get away.

The Pope & Young Club describes fair chase as follows: "*....the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit of free-ranging wild game animals in a manner which does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over the animal. It does, however extend beyond the hunt itself; it is an attitude and a way of life based in a deep-seated respect for wildlife, for the environment, and for other individuals who share the bounty of this continent's natural resources*".

The club then goes on to exclude the following from fair chase:

- (i) An animal helpless in a trap, deep snow or water, or on ice.
- (ii) Hunting from a power vehicle or power boat.
- (iii) Using a light at night.
- (iv) The use of tranquilizers or poison.
- (v) The use of an aircraft to herd or drive animals or to guide the hunter on the ground.
- (vi) The use of electronic devices for attracting, locating, or pursuing game, or guiding the hunter to such game, or by the use of a bow or arrow to which any electronic device is attached.

Being an American club that only recognizes North American game, the club also regards hunting on fenced game farms as not being in the spirit of fair chase. Whilst this is still realistic in, say, Alaska and British Columbia, it is simply not realistic in 21st century Southern Africa. In South Africa no hunting is allowed in public game reserves and hunting takes place on privately owned land which is properly fenced. By the way, all game reserves are also fenced. The result is that South Africa now has more game than at any other stage during the last 100 years or more. Private landowners also have about seven times the game numbers of the state owned reserves. If these landowners were not able to harvest their game through hunting, the game would have no value and would have to be removed to make way for stock and/or crop farming.

Wildlife in many parts of Africa faces a bleak future. Some countries have virtually lost all their game and many species have become extinct or is on the brink of extinction. It is only South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and a few countries in Central and West Africa that are able to offer the international sportsman decent hunting opportunities. In many previously game rich countries, such as Ethiopia and Malawi, the wildlife has disappeared into the cooking pots of the hungry local masses because there is no private landownership and no wildlife conservation by "game farmers". The role of the game rancher and the hunter in conserving Africa's wildlife has become absolutely crucial.

Be that as it may, if the bowhunter is hunting on a fenced property (as is the case throughout most of Southern Africa), the property should be large enough to ensure it is not classified as a “*controlled environment*” - meaning an enclosure designed to prevent the animal from escaping and that requires the intervention of man on an ongoing basis to provide food, water, artificial shelter and health care. Hunting should be restricted to self-sustaining wildlife populations in an extensive wildlife system.

THE BOWHUNTER’S EQUIPMENT

A bow hunter should understand how a bow and its accessories work, whether it is a primitive bow, compound bow, recurve bow or longbow. He should also know what arrows and broadheads would be most suitable for his intended quarry.

A bow hunter should also be familiar with kinetic energy which can be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{(V^2)m}{450240}$$

Where: V = velocity of arrow in feet per second, and

m = arrow weight in grains ("gr")

The following can be taken as a general guideline in respect of minimum kinetic energy and arrow weight requirements for African game:

Arrow Weight	Kinetic Energy	Game That May Be Hunted
300gr	40 ft/lbs	Steenbok, Duiker, Impala, Springbok, Grysbok, Suni, Red duiker
400gr	50 ft/lbs	Warthog, Kudu, Hartebeest, Bushpig, Waterbuck, Zebra, Nyala
500gr	60 ft/lbs	Gemsbok, Eland, Blue wildebeest, Sable, Roan
600gr	80 ft/lbs	Buffalo
800gr	95 ft/lbs	Giraffe, Rhino, Hippo
800gr	105 ft/lbs	Elephant

ARROW PLACEMENT

Remember that shot placement is far more important than the size of the trophy.

It is the bow hunter's responsibility to ensure a quick, clean kill through perfect shot placement. He should know the anatomy of the animal and where the arrow has hit as well as the direction of the flight.

The shooting lane should be open and clear of obstruction. Take only broadside or quartering away shots into the heart and lung area. Be sure that there are no animals standing behind the animal to be taken.

Remember that the vitals of African game sit somewhat lower than is the case with American game. Get your PH to explain the perfect shot before going out hunting.

If an animal is wounded, the ethical bowhunter will encourage his PH to put the animal down with a rifle at the first opportunity. We have occasionally found a bowhunter who insists on following the wounded animal up with a bow only so that it can be regarded as “bow kill”. This is however not always possible or practical, and the ethical thing to do is in any event to put the animal out of its misery as soon as possible.

The ethical bowhunter will always seek a quick, clean kill and will never attempt to shoot at a walking or running animal; or shoot beyond his own limitations; or hunt with a bow with a heavier draw weight than what he is comfortable with or used to.

He will know his bow's penetration ability before attempting the shot. (Remember: with low poundage it is always better to wait for the perfect broadside shot.)

It goes without saying that ALL shots taken, including clear misses, will be reported to the PH.

THE OBSESSION WITH THE TAPE

An unfortunate development in recent decades is the obsession that some hunters seem to have the measuring tape. If their trophy does not take a place in the top listings in the record books, or if their trophy measures less than that of their hunting companions, the safari is regarded as a failure. A good representative trophy is simply not good enough for these hunters.

This attitude does nothing for the brotherhood of hunters or the image of sport hunting, and these hunters forget that almost any hunt can be rewarding. They also forget that hunting is not a competition; the hunter who bags the biggest set of horns is not necessarily the

best hunter; he was simply luckier than his fellow hunters. The size of the trophy has little to do with the hunter; it has everything to do with animal.

Trophy hunting is not just about taking top places in the record books; it is about the totality of the experience and the memories that the hunter takes home. The real gauge of success in hunting is to be found in the stories and memories of mature and grateful sportsmen who share their experiences with the hunters of tomorrow.

An “accomplished” hunter is not necessarily the one who can boast with his name in the record books. Rather, it is someone who has hunted countless species in countless habitats over a long time, and who has gained much hunting experience and knowledge about the species represented on the wall of his trophy room. He has probably often traveled to foreign lands, hunted with excellent Professional Hunters, pushed himself to limit, and collected a wealth of experiences that will warm his heart in the cold days of old age.

Whilst it is not suggested that any trophy hunter should take inferior trophy animals, the role of the measuring tape should be put in the right perspective and not be allowed to ruin a great safari experience.

PICTURES

Show the necessary respect when taking pictures afterwards. Clean the wound so that no blood is shown on the photograph. Do not sit or stand on the animal and remove all arrows from the body.

SAFETY

The responsible bowhunter will develop a safety consciousness. He will use a hooded quiver to prevent accidental injuries and will never draw a bow if not intending to shoot. He will always inspect limbs, cams, strings, cables and loop before each hunting outing, as well as all broadheads and arrows to ensure there are no weak spots, abrasion cracks or out of alignment. He will never walk with an arrow on the string.

THE BOWHUNTER AS AN ENVIRONMENTALIST

Bowhunting plays a significant role in preserving the habitat which is being hunted. The ethical bowhunter will thus appreciate and respect anti-pollution measures as well as measures to preserve our natural resources. He is a believer in *sustainable utilization of our natural resources* and will leave only his footprints behind.

He will not participate in any form of canned hunting and will only hunt free *ranging animals*, i.e. animals that are not dependent for survival on feed supplied by man. However, since the large mass migrations in times of drought is no longer possible due to fences, many game ranchers do provide supplemental feed and licks to help the game through these tough times. This common practice throughout Southern Africa, and is not regarded as detracting in any way from *fair chase hunting*. In fact, it is regarded as highly unethical and irresponsible to let animals die from starvation if drought relief in the form of feed and licks are possible.

The ethical hunter will familiarize him/herself with the relevant legislation and the hunting rules of his Outfitter/PH, and will respect these to the letter.

THE BOWHUNTER AS A GENTLEMAN

In my experience bowhunters are mostly real gentlemen. An ethical bowhunter will always

- ✓ endeavor to improve his bush and hunting skills all the time
- ✓ show respect to all wildlife
- ✓ hunt only what is allowed to be hunted
- ✓ avoid shooting pregnant females or females with dependent young
- ✓ refrain from alcohol use before and during a hunt
- ✓ prepare well for a hunt
- ✓ use a bow within his capability - with enough kinetic energy for the animal to be hunted
- ✓ check accuracy before the hunt
- ✓ hunt in the spirit of fair chase only
- ✓ show appreciation after the hunt

He will NEVER hunt from the back off a vehicle and will NEVER bowhunt plains game with a spotlight.

SUMMARY

The following lines were written by Paul Brandt and summarize the ethical approach to bowhunting very well:

Blessed are the bowhunters who practice often:

for they are the ones who shall score

Blessed are they who use razor-sharp broadheads:

for their kills shall be quick and clean

Blessed are they who use hooded bow quivers:

for their blood shall not be shed needlessly

Blessed are they who know the countryside:

for rescuers they shall not be in need of

*Blessed are they who hesitate if a shot is unsure:
for they shall know the meaning of sportsmanship
Blessed are bowhunters who teach others the sport:
for its future shall thus be assured
Blessed are they who study game and its habitat;
for they shall enjoy the hunt - even without a kill
Blessed are they who do not scorn other bowmen for using other equipment:
for they shall create goodwill and brotherhood
Yea, blessed are they who hunt with the bow:
for they shall know hunting in its truest form .*

E-mail: willem@matlabas.co.za
Web: www.matlabas.co.za/hunting