

Wild and additive-free: Hunted meat lives a natural life, and hunters aim to ensure it has a humane death

In defence of my hunting



When asked to explain why he hunts, Andrew Venables has this answer

Judging from my experience of social life in 2014, if I walked into a large mixed gathering of people and introduced myself as a hunter I might find myself shunned, reviled and judged bad by the majority, notably if the gathering were metropolitan. This is why many people, especially those in the public domain, keep quiet about the fact they hunt and shoot.

Once the subject of hunting, and killing animals, arises I find the most common questions I face are: "How can you kill beautiful animals?" and, "Surely you don't need to hunt and kill animals when there are supermarkets?" The most emotive questions are, "Why do you enjoy killing animals?" and, "How can you say you respect nature when you kill animals?"

The first two questions are not too difficult to deal with. On the subject of killing beautiful things, it is clearly fatuous to propose that only ugly things should be killed and presumably eaten. Modern agriculture focuses on the consumption of poultry, sheep and cattle and I note that chicks, lambs and calves are not exactly offensive to the eye. If this statement is made

by someone chewing on a burger, looking forward to a Sunday roast or wearing leather shoes then they are hoist by their own petard, as the Bard wrote. If the speaker is a vegetarian or vegan, I promise I will never force feed them rare steak and I respect their right to choose their own diet, just as they should respect mine.

The supermarket question is swiftly debunked by explaining the immense satisfaction of growing one's own vegetables, having home-laid eggs, and knowing the animals you eat were organically raised, had a decent life and died a swift, humane death near their birthplace. I have never met anyone who believed that factory farming, with its industrial-scale slaughterhouses hundreds of miles from "the farm", and the monoculture of crops supported by agrochemicals was anything more than a necessary evil to meet demand for cheap food. Hunting's adversaries will soon be drooling at the thought of home-grown carrots that actually smell of carrot and venison from deer that lived and died wild and additive-free.

Now on to the tough questions that often have 60-year-old stalkers and wildlife managers, hunting city bankers and sporting rifle shooters burning with frustration.

Why do you enjoy killing animals? I can only answer for myself, and note the question is based on an assumption that I do. The fact that I hunt neither indicates, suggests or means that I enjoy killing animals. I accept



Part of the food chain: Humans are included in a network of predator-prey relationships, not separate from it

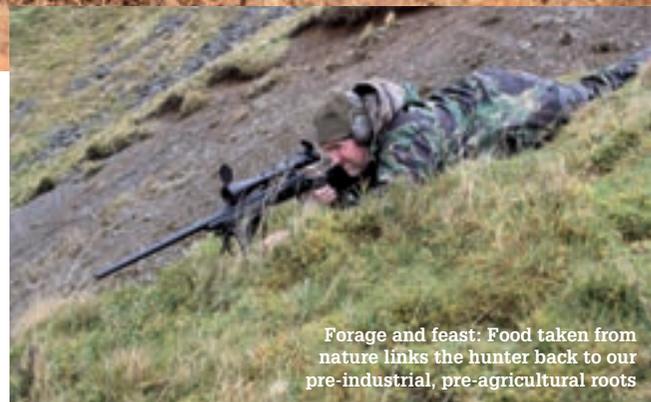
that the culmination of a successful hunt means I will kill. If I enjoyed killing, I would not hunt. Instead I would perhaps breed rodents and kill one when the fancy took me. The fact is that I do not enjoy killing; I can't, as it has never made me smile. Ironically, being outsmarted by my quarry often has.

I accept killing as part of my living just as I accept death as an inevitable consequence of my life. All natural life is in some way sustained through killing and death. I understand I am part of nature, to be fed on unless I can avoid predators and parasites and to feed on other life to sustain myself. The production of crops, conservation and keeping a pet cat all involve killing. Plant life sustains herbivores, herbivores sustain carnivores, and unless I missed something, I am *homo sapiens* and an omnivorous intelligent ape. I don't enjoy killing more than any other natural predator does; it is part of living, unless you work for Walt Disney. I don't.

Sometimes when hunting I have decided not to make the shot for a myriad reasons and not missed the kill a bit. When I decide to kill, I aim to be swift and humane. In truth I am highly proficient at killing, which is good. This is the result of constant training and practice.

The type of hunting I choose embodies the spirit of fair chase, best described in *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*, by Jim Posewitz. In it he writes, "Fundamental to ethical hunting is the idea of fair chase. This concept addresses the balance between the hunter and the hunted. It is a balance that allows hunters to occasionally succeed while animals generally avoid being taken." This is the very essence of natural selection and evolution.

With regards to the question "How can you say you respect nature when you kill animals?" I believe many people think themselves separated from and above nature, hovering in a confused world of dominion over animals and equality of rights between humans and animals – especially pretty ones.



Forage and feast: Food taken from nature links the hunter back to our pre-industrial, pre-agricultural roots

The famous American anthropologist Clifford Geertz once said that he believed "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun." Ultimately, the only animals who buy the idea that humans are not animals are humans themselves.

Try negotiating equal rights or greater significance with a hungry polar bear, a bull that owns the field, a territorial dog or a mosquito in a small dark room. Nature is all tooth and claw, predator and prey. Fundamentally, in nature, I have as much right to hunt as a mosquito or any predator has to hunt me. I celebrate the hunt, not the kill.

I respect nature so much that I choose to be part of it. Food you grow yourself helps a bit but, in truth, food you forage and food you hunt provides the strongest link with our pre-industrial and pre-agricultural roots. I know that every time I hunt, gather and feast I experience a fundamental satisfaction deeper than that any modern "lifestyle" experience gives me. I feel a sense of respect and gratitude to the quarry and an involvement in the cycle of life and death that no packet food or electronic gizmo can ever give me. I don't expect everyone to agree, or to understand, but I do expect everyone to respect my rights and beliefs. I hunt, therefore I am. Call it my religion if it helps. ■

For more information about WMS Firearms Training, contact Andrew Venables on 01974 831869 or visit www.wmsfirearmstraining.com.