

# Are hunters conservationists?

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I know I have written about this topic before. However, the hunting industry continues to spread the delusion that somehow raising animals to shoot is "conservation" and thus hunters are "conservationists." So, as long as they continue to vomit this dribble, I will continue to pound this subject. This is especially the case as they also continue to insist that their kind of shooting "conservation" is or should be the only way to "manage" wildlife.

Why do they consider themselves to be conservationists? It seems the only claim they have is that they, according to them, single handedly "saved" a few favored species, deer and ducks, from over abuse by...hunters! And why did they save them? So they could hunt them again! I have written on this hypocrisy before and the fact that they, hunters, have done little to help and at times, hindered, the recovery of the many other species in need of help. So, I will not dwell on it here.

Here, rather, I want to write about, detail, the many actions hunters have taken that run counter to what most of the rest of us would normally consider to be conservation. Actions that if any other group took, they surely would not be considered conservationists!

So, let's begin the list.

- 1) **Introducing exotic species:** Would conservationists purposely introduce exotic species, especially ones that have extreme negative impacts on ecosystems? Hunters have and the list is long.

Here I will just name a few exotic species hunters have introduced. Why? To hunt them!

- What conservationist would purposely release MILLIONS of exotic birds, pheasants, Hungarian partridge, chukers, YEARLY? And then advocate killing native predators to protect these exotics? Hunters do! And they consider these to be success stories! Why? Because they have become significant hunted species in many areas. South Dakota alone, for example has an estimated population of over 8 million exotic pheasants and release an additional 300,000 a year so that hunters can kill over a million a year! Where do all these birds live? They live on historic native prairie grouse habitat, converted to farmland. Did hunters, as true conservationists do, try to save this habitat from the plow? It seems that rather than to fight to preserve the native prairie chicken's habitat, which once occurred over all the state, hunters are content to hunt exotic birds instead. This is NOT conservation, this is capitulation to the primary threat to all native wildlife...habitat destruction.
- Exotic ungulates! Again, the list is long, especially in the West. Nilgai antelope, Black buck antelope both from India, several African antelope species, Oryx also from Africa, Fallow

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deer from Europe, Sika deer from Asia, Barbary sheep from North Africa, Ibex from the Middle East. The list goes on! All of these species were PURPOSELY introduced by... state game agencies! Why? To “enhance” the hunting opportunities of “conservationist??” hunters! I thought wildlife agencies were to manage NATIVE wildlife!?? Instead, they are introducing exotics. And like many exotics, these animals are having impacts on native fauna. Oryx are competing with native deer for the already limited forage in the arid areas of the West. But are hunters concerned? Not really, they are content to hunt oryx, which make a better trophy anyway.

However, though most, if not all of these exotic ungulates are negatively affecting the ecosystems, their impact is overshadowed by the one exotic that is changing entire ecosystems, the European wild boar. Though domestic pigs are also exotics and occasionally go wild, in the early 1900's Eurasian wild boars were PURPOSELY introduced by... hunters, for... hunting “opportunities”! From then, primarily with the aid of hunter “conservationists” transporting them, wild boars are now found in 45 of the 48 lower states. These boars are prolific and devastating to the environment. As pigs do, they root the soil in search of food, any food. From plants to animals, wild boars are wreaking havoc on native species and whole ecosystems. And what are the hunters doing about it? Other than clamoring that through their “shooting” management, they can control the problem, some hunters were recently caught transporting boars to new areas, so they could hunt them!

It would seem on this issue alone, purposely introducing exotics, would disqualify hunters of even remotely calling themselves “conservationists” but the list goes on.

- 2) **Extermination of native species:** The “conservation” history of hunters in this country is not only filled with decimation of preferred game species, e.g. passenger pigeons, Carolina parrot, bison, deer, elk, ducks but with many other less preferred species, e.g. wolves, cougars, grizzly bears, etc... It is the return of a few of the favored species that hunters hang their supposed conservation hats on. However, it is the continued persecution of the less favored, but more ecologically important, ones that make it not a hat of conservation but a dunce cap fueled by ignorant pure self-interest and greed. Even their hunting/conservationist hero, Theodore Roosevelt, advocated the removal of predators to “protect” trophy species. Roosevelt's actions and those of many hunters in his time were not to protect all wildlife or ecosystems but to protect trophy species so he could kill them. Roosevelt was NOT a conservationist, he was a trophy hunter.

Hunters, who brag about knowing “how nature works” appear to know less about nature than most elementary children! It is amply known in the true conservation community, and by many children, that all native species have a part in ecosystems and that the predators, large and small, probably have the most important part. They are the shepherds of ecosystems, keeping herbivores in their ecological place. Time after time, it has been demonstrated that removal of predators leads to ecological destruction. And returning herbivores without their

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predators, an ecological crime, a crime, hunters repeatedly commit, most recently, in the eastern U.S.

It started with returning deer to the East, to provide “hunting opportunities” and now the latest and potentially most severe, the reintroduction of elk. As these deer and elk populations continue to explode, an ecological disaster is unfolding. Deer and now increasingly elk, are having devastating impacts on native plants and animals in the eastern ecosystems. Does the “conservationist” hunting industry support or have plans to reintroduce wolves and pumas, the natural predators of deer and elk to control this disaster? Forget it! For them, the more deer, the more elk, the better. They encourage continual growth in deer numbers and look forward to the spread of elk across all the East. They put on their dunce hat, ignoring the vital role of predators and argue that wolves and pumas will not only suppress this growth but “decimate” elk and deer populations.

Their arguments ring shallow in that they are not concerned with predators eating ALL of the deer and elk, which, if hunters knew anything about nature, they would know predators cannot do that. No, they are not concerned about “decimation”, they are concerned that predators reducing the number of deer and elk to ecologically sustainable numbers will result in LESS animals the hunters could shoot! For hunters, ecological stability is not desirable because it does not lead to more game in the bag. That is not conservation and hunters are NOT conservationists.

What conservation group would purposely hold contests to see who can shoot the most of a native species? Hunters do! These “killing contests” are held widely and proudly by “conservationist” hunters to kill hundreds if not thousands of native animals from prairie dogs to coyotes. Awards are given, proud “hunters” are photographed and posted on the internet. Is this their concept of how one conserves through hunting? Killing just for the fun of killing? This is not conservation and hunters are NOT conservationists.

- 3) **Poisoning the environment:** What conservationist knowingly goes around poisoning the environment with toxic material?...hunters do! Most conservationists realize that healthy wildlife populations require healthy environments to live in. An essential part of conservationists’ efforts is to fight against pollution, unless you are a hunter. Hunters rarely are active in pollution fights unless it directly affects them. And then, they are on the side of the cause of that pollution! Annually, tens of thousands of tons of lead shot and bullets are spread out onto the environment by hunters. Though its toxic consequences to wildlife are well documented and known non-toxic alternatives are available, hunters have consistently fought to prevent the banning of lead shot. Why? Because to use less toxic alternatives reduces their effectiveness in killing. By their continual refusal to support removal of lead from hunting, hunters have repeatedly demonstrated that they put their hunting pleasure over the health of the wildlife they hunt and the environment they live in. Hunters are NOT conservationists.

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- 4) **Societal support for conservation:** Conservationists recognize that they need a broad based societal support for conservation efforts. Conservation must be inclusive. Society as a whole must participate in conservation efforts to be successful. Hunters do not recognize this inclusivity. From the very beginning of hunting, hunters have strived to make participation in management decisions to be exclusive not inclusive. Original "management" agencies were set up to be the sole representatives of the hunting industry. In many states, wildlife commissioners must by law be hunters. Hunters continually resist ANY participation by the non-hunting population though non-hunters make up 95% of the people who OWN the wildlife! The intent is clear. Hunters do not want anyone other than themselves to make decisions, that affect all wildlife, regarding how wildlife are managed. And that management is for excess of favored species over all else.

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- 5) **Killing endangered species:** What conservationist in her or his right mind would advocate killing individuals of a threatened or endangered species...to save them? Hunter do! Hunters say the best, and to many, the only way to manage wildlife is by hunting them, that is killing them...for sport. Their lame argument goes that if a person can hunt an animal, he will somehow care about that species and it will somehow benefit. Again, they point with pride to the few success stories of deer and elk recovery. Again, failing to mention that what they saved these species from was...hunting. They also fail to mention that many species are hunted specifically to reduce their numbers or better still eliminate them. I need not only mention native predators again and ongoing efforts by these "conservationist" hunters to decimate wolf populations both in Alaska and in the western states. Apart from predators, there are literally hundreds of native species of "varmints" that hunters kill, not to manage their numbers or "care" about them but to kill as many as they can, just like the good old days. If one adds up all the species that are listed as "fair game" for hunters to kill, only a small percent of them, ducks and deer, would remotely benefit from hunter "management". Hunters are not concerned about these other species nor are these species "benefitting" from management by the gun.

Lastly, to argue that hunting is THE way to manage wildlife, then by default, should it not be THE way ALL wildlife are managed? IF hunting ducks and deer has been so beneficial to their populations, surely it should benefit the probably 99% of all wildlife (from insects to mammals) that are NOT hunted! Should not we have a season on butterflies, on song birds? On field mice? Should there not be contests to see who can bag the biggest monarch, the biggest robin, the biggest chipmunk?

But wait...it seems most of these species are doing fine...without hunting!

- 6) **Illegally killing game animals:** How many conservationists illegally kill the animals they are conserving? Hunters do! Though it is hard to get estimates of just how much poaching occurs in the U.S., rough estimates put the number of hunters that kill illegally in the hundreds of

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thousands. This ranges from commercial style poaching to hunters “pushing the limits” of the regulations their own agencies established! This poaching results in millions of wildlife being killed illegally by hunters! Sure, they and their agencies feint shock and outrage at it. Afterall, these are less animals for them to kill legally! But deep down, many of them who don’t poach envy the poacher. And many of them know who they are, family, friends, acquaintances, and don’t report them. Hunters don’t have the will nor the desire to police themselves and so are not conservationists nor is hunting a conservation technique.

I guess that is a long enough of a list for now. I am sure many of you could add to it to further demonstrate that hunters ARE NOT conservationists. To call themselves this is self-deluding and a lie. Furthermore, sport hunting is NOT a conservation technique and to espouse that it is demonstrates a clear lack of knowledge of how nature works. Only when hunters truly espouse genuine conservation practices, e.g. reintroducing wolves and pumas to the Eastern U.S., can they begin to even think their actions have any conservation value. Until then, they and the style of hunting “management” they espouse is not conservation.