Hunter Declines in North America and Europe: Causes, Concerns and Proposed Research

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Antihunting Attitudes of the General Public—The big threat?

- Hunters tend to believe that the general public ...
  - dislikes hunting and hunters
  - and this negative attitude is increasing

And will lead to the end of hunting

- But the data that we and others have collected
  - Show High levels of support for hunting in general and for hunting that involves food
Support for Hunting

- Over 90% showed support for some kind of hunting our 1996 survey in Sweden and in the US
- We found an increase in support for hunting in US in 1996 using exactly the same question that Kellert used in 1975.

Increased Support for Deer Hunting in New Jersey

Research done by James Applegate
Yes

- Negative attitudes and activism about specific kinds of hunting in specific places can lead to ban—for example
  - Trapping in Colorado
  - Fox hunting in the UK

- BUT
  - The focus on attitudes (*which we can seldom change*), and which are generally positive keeps us from dealing with the REAL threats to the future of hunting
Declining Hunter Numbers

Aging Hunter Populations

Declining Recruitment
The United States
Percent Decline in US Hunter Numbers 1996-2006

-10
-5
-31
-25
-26
-35
-30
-25
-20
-15
-10
-5
0

All
Big Game
Small Game
Waterfowl
Other

10 Percent Decline In Ten Years
License sales decreased by 105,000
13% Decrease

At the same time the number of people increased by nearly a million to 7.6 million

Percent of the population that holds a hunting license dropped from 12.2% to 9.3% (Still very high compared to Europe)
British Columbia Canada

Decline in Percentage of Residents that Hunt 1976-2003

Over 6% to Less than 2%

Figure 2
Source: BC Stats
Number of Italian Hunters
(about 1.1% of Total Population)

1,496,000

966,586

Over 50% Decline In 15 years!

685,000
Piedmont Region in N Italy
(Population 429,000—5.5% are hunters)
Declining Hunter Numbers
In France

- 2.2 Million
- 1.4 Million
Hunters in Europe

- Finland
- Norway
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Ireland
- Greece
- France
- Spain
- Portugal
- United Kingdom
- Italy
- Austria
- Slovenia
- Switzerland
- Germany
- Belgium
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Hungary
Owners of the hunting license in Germany

Sustainable but less than 0.5%
Of the population of 82.3 million hunt

hunting year
number of owners


number of owners
Austria 1957-2007

hunting licences in Austria

number

year

Second Concern: Aging Hunter Populations

- Existing hunter populations appear to be much older than the general population
- What effect will the age distribution have on the near term future of hunting?
Two thirds of the hunters are under 45
Two thirds of the hunters are over 45

Almost one fourth are sixty five or over
Nearly two thirds are over 50
Age distribution of Wisconsin deer hunters - 2004
Hunting Recruitment

How fast are we replacing the old hunters?
Recruitment into Hunting in France

Results of the hunting licence exam since 1975

- Pass
- Failed
- Absent
Hunter initiation: the percentage of children (age 6 and over) residing at home who have ever participated in hunting (US Data)
Percent Decline in Initiation

US 1990-2005
Why are hunter populations declining and aging and failing to reproduce?

We don’t really know...some things we can rule out...others need investigation and most of all we need better data
Probably not having an effect

- Anti-hunting attitudes of the general public
- Hunter education requirements in the US
- Change in Family structure (single parent families)
Hunter Education Requirements

- These might seem like barriers
  - But they are also ways of becoming a hunter

- We examined hunting participation among 600,000 individuals and found no lower rate of being a first time hunter for those who had an education requirements than those who did not when other variables were statistically controled.

Single Parent Families

- Using the General Social Survey
- Found that controlling of residence, race, and income--children of single parent families were no less likely to hunt.
- For example Jay Reed the Milwaukee Journal Outdoor writer—grew up in a mother headed household
- In rural areas someone will take a boy hunting—but not a girl
Not having a clear and immediate effect

- **Urbanization**
  - This is a slow process
  - Italy and France have not had increases in urbanization at the time of steep declines

- **Suburbanization and loss of hunting opportunities**
  - Suburban families have least loss of initiation—this is where the hunters live in the US
How we lose hunters? -- CWD in Wisconsin

CWD killed no hunters...they didn’t get sick and die from eating deer.

The agency reaction to CWD, a classic example of the social amplification of risk...

Led to the reduction of 95,000 gun and bow licenses in one year and...

They didn’t come back
What also might be having an effect

- Complexity of rules and entry difficulties
- Change in game populations
- Mobile human population
  - Difficulty to find entry points
- Increase in alternative activities
- Loss of leisure time
- Loss of social capital
- Declining influence of rural culture
Next Steps

- We must build a better science of hunter population dynamics
- We must treat the study of hunter population with the same attention as we do declines in wildlife populations
- We must carefully study the cases where we have declines to understand why
We further need to

- Join hunter data with census data
- Gather better comparable data
  - Need to accumulate the raw data by individual ages, and keep this data base up to date
- Shift from individual survey data to aggregate data which can deal with social trends
- Follow panels of participants and non participants over time
I PROPOSE: International Center for the Study of Hunter Population

- Long term—5 years or more
- Interdisciplinary
  - Human Demographers, Biologists, Sociologists, Human Geographers, Anthropologists, Psychologists
- Substantial Funding
- Accumulate data
- Examine and test the hypotheses
- Propose and evaluate programs to maintain or increase hunter populations

But who is going to support and fund this?
We are not likely to get help from the general scientific community

“I do not think that the scientific community cares if hunters go up or down. There is no convention of biodiversity which appeals to brown bear or lynx.”

Swedish Professor of Wildlife Ecology

It must be up to the hunters to accomplish
Leopold was worried about extinctions of game species when he wrote “Goose Music” in the 1930’s.

“...And when the dawn-wind stirs through the cottonwoods, and the grey light steals from the hills over the old river sliding past its wide brown sandbars--what if there be no more goose music.”

The science and management success of the 20th century has been to restore these species...
But...what if there be no more hunters to hear those geese???

That is our challenge for the 21st Century

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