

# The Hunter-Naturalist and the Development of the Code of Gamesmanship

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The sport of hunting in America has retained a basic relationship with nature. Mechanization in the forms of overland vehicles, long-distance rifles, and even airplanes, has deprived many hunters of the original sense of ordeal. Yet the sport requires a warm-blooded animal to chase or ambush, if not kill, and equally important, some natural terrain, scenery and climate for its environment. To hunt an animal over artificial turf under a climate-controlled dome would be unthinkable to most hunters.

This close proximity to nature produced by 1900 a phenomenon known as the "hunter-naturalist". Directly opposite to an image constructed by conservationists in the 1930's, the "hunter-slob", who hunts any number of anything, anywhere, anytime, and anyhow to satisfy his grossest recreational desires, the "hunter-naturalist" maintains always a deep reverence for nature and a restraint in his methods and appetite. Of course, these two images are extremes between which actual hunters fall. These images also mask a larger American attitude toward nature: the paradox of revering remorsefully the very nature one is enthusiastically destroying. When this respect conjoined with other social and moral imperatives, the code of the good hunter, or gamesmanship developed.

The motives beneath the development of the gamesmanship code were complex. Part of the impetus was pragmatic and elitist. Faced with dwindling game reserves, foresighted hunters drafted measures to ensure themselves adequate numbers for future hunts. Often these endeavors were more than tacit and found print in the by-laws of various hunting clubs, most notably the Boone and Crockett Club founded in 1887. Eventually game laws incorporated this code into their provisions: restricted seasons, protection of species' females, bag limits, and license fees.

On a deeper psychological level the code tried to reconcile the fears and criticism that hunting was thinly disguised savagery and that the pleasure derived was inherently sadistic. As the Puritans had deplored hunting for just such reasons, the nineteenth-century exponents of the code puritanically sought to curb any undue sadism and to codify this restraint under the mantle of manliness, and even further, gentlemanliness. This curbing led to a de-emphasis on the importance of the kill and a re-emphasis on the tonic qualities of hunting ceremony and ritual and of tromping through terrain in brisk weather. If the hunter decided to kill, he must do so with utmost sportsmanlike methods; if not, he received the large consolation of communicating with nature.

The close influence of nature upon hunting has had a long history in America. Our first eminent naturalists such as John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson were hunters, somewhat for pleasure, but also by the necessity of obtaining specimens. The biographers of that archetypical American hunter, Daniel Boone, lauded both his hunting prowess and his powers of natural observation. Similarly James Fenimore Cooper praised his fictional Natty Bumppo, and Francis Parkman glorified his Henry Chatillon of *The Oregon Trail* for their uncanny knowledge of nature. Less articulate hunters like the mountain men believed that their survival and livelihood depended upon how well they read nature.

The term "hunter-naturalist" first cropped up in Charles Webber's *The Hunter-*

*Naturalist, or Wild Scenes and Wild Hunters* (1852). His accounts fell heavily to the side of sensationalism, yet also evince accurate natural description and even remorse. But it was during the 1880's and 1890's, while the code of gamesmanship was formally emerging, that the term reached its present meaning. Hunters such as Charles Sheldon, George Bird Grinnell, G.O. Shields, Henry Fairfield Osborn and Theodore Roosevelt began calling for wiser usage of wildlife and wider acquaintance with undiluted nature. Roosevelt's works, such as *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893), delineated the code for the eager public. Famed naturalist John Burroughs lent his influence to these hunters' pleas and later supported their rebukes of "nature fakers" like Ernest Thompson Seton. William Temple Hornaday, curator of the New York Zoological Society, carried the cause into the 1930's.

Over recent decades, with sport hunting encountering increasing criticism, the idealization of the "hunter-naturalist" has received ardent support from several quarters: seasoned hunters like Archibald Rutledge, Jim Woodworth, or Sam Wright, conservationist Aldo Leopold, writer Vance Bourjaily, game warden Frank Calkins, and, of course, hunting magazines. Yet even this idealization has not gone unchallenged. Critics such as Cleveland Amory and Bil Gilbert, and even Leopold, charge that the image is untenable and purely nostalgic in that few hunters approach it or even aspire to it.

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## Reaction

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### COMMENT:

Both papers, if taken together, present a balanced picture of the historical development, current status, and future challenges for the hunting community. Dr. Stange has artfully portrayed man's shift from the position of hunter for survival to that of hunter for sport with man as the dominant species. On the other hand, Dr. Altherr has utilized an interesting selection of primary and secondary sources in presenting an historical contrast between the hunter-naturalist and the "game butcher."

With the advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century, oral tradition as well as handwritten manuscripts relating to man's thoughts about agriculture and hunting became more easily recorded in the printed form for educated men to read. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the primary sources published in the English language relating to agriculture and hunting increased. In 1567, Charles Estienne, a French agriculture writer, published his...*Maison Rustique*....The latter edition of this work, which came out in 1600, included a detailed description of the hunting of hart, wild "bore," hare, and fox, as well as the art of falconry. While also touching upon these areas, *Recreation* first published in 1731 provides useful information concerning the use of the long-bow or cross-bow as well as the ancient sport of cockfighting which eventually found its way to America where it was reportedly enjoyed by such notables as Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton. John Worlidge in his treatise *Systema Agricultura* which was first published in 1669 and dedicated to the gentry and yeomen of England, attempts to identify and justify areas where