



THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

opinion by Doug Borland

As a bowhunter concerned about the future; and hoping that my grandsons are blessed with the opportunities in the woods that I have experienced, I am acutely aware of the image of hunters in general, and specifically the image of bowhunters.

A recent headline in the Seattle Times, the city's largest newspaper, caught my eye and reminded me again that we who care cannot be complacent in representing modern day hunting in this changing world.

Under the headline of "Demented Social Club", the article described a wildlife poaching ring in Oregon and Washington states, that operated out of greed, glorifying and filming the biggest and most kills without regard to meat salvage but only to salve, yes, their demented egos.

The problem is that this kind of press tends to tar all hunters with the same brush, and adds fuel to the anti-hunters fires. To their credit, the authors of this article refrained from calling the killers "hunters", but the infractions were hunting regulations, the laws they broke were hunting laws, and the inference was there for the readers to judge.

Eighty percent of the public are non-hunters, and by sheer numbers the future of hunting in America lies with them and their power at the ballot box. We just have to be actively presenting another side of the story.

As another example, the October 1917 issue of National Geographic magazine presented an article entitled "Should We Kill animals to Save Them", ostensibly an article about how hunting could possibly be a conservation tool. However, the target audience was non-hunters, and the bias of the authors and the photographers came through to me immediately: the cause of Africa's decline of the big five and other species was at the hands of trigger-happy millionaire Western hunters, while brushing over or disregarding rampant poaching, habitat loss, and a myriad of other contribution factors.

This view of hunting is widespread, and frankly we are up against what might be insurmountable odds as we become more and more in the minority. At the very least, we cannot afford to be silent, we have to stand up and speak out about the honorable and ethical hunting practices that we at PBS promote and practice. How many mainstream magazines or newspapers ever have a pro-hunting article? Why don't magazines like Outside or Backpacker even

acknowledge that hunters are part of their world? Companies like REI, and other huge outdoor retailers, are either overtly anti-hunting or damning us by omission.

To survive, we have to be pro-active, presenting an image of hunting, (at least how we practice it), that is open, honest, and defensible. We must take the lead in condemning hunter practices, such as the Demented Social Club, that disgust and horrify us as well as the non-hunters.

It is difficult and seldom rewarding to be an "activist", especially with a minority opinion. Lets face it, it is easier to retreat unto ourselves, preach to the choir, and avoid the conflict that is inevitable when speaking out and arguing controversial issues. But how can any of us, when we see the offensive outdoor pornography passed off as "Hunting Videos" on TV; or read what the Whack-Em and Stack-Em low life "heros" present as they pretend to represent what we do.

Much of hunting in general has been influenced by commercialization, and the glorification of "trophy hunting", while becoming a multi-billion dollar industry driven by dollars that has little or nothing to do with why or the way we hunt. We are in acute danger of losing our hunting rights as these false images become the only images of "hunting" that the non-hunting majority sees.

A faction of hunters believe that when we condemn "our own" by speaking out about questionably ethical but perhaps legal hunting behavior, such as hunting behind high-fences, canned lion hunts, selling whitetails on game farms "by the inch", and other borderline "hunting" practices, we are playing into the anti-hunters hands. On the contrary, I believe we do a disservice to ourselves and real hunters everywhere if we do not publically and actively condemn such immoral and unethical behaviors.

We must recognize and consider the views of the non-hunting public if bowhunting as we know it today is to survive. We cannot avoid the issues; PBS as a group and individually must be politically active and present bowhunting in the best light, because there is an army of others that will present us their way if we don't. In the National Geographic article, the authors asked: "Might it now be time to stop killing the dwindling herds for sport and display?"

I for one do not want to be defined by unknowing if well-meaning non-hunters. We as hunters can and should contribute to and define our own future. We can be active in our state and local hunting and conservation scenes, finding issues where we can present ourselves in the most positive light. We can publish opposing views, foster intelligent debate, and have input into the public process. Best of all, we can conduct ourselves in the field with the highest and most defensible hunting behavior, one from which we then can then defend and promote to even the most uninformed non-hunter. PBS should be leading the way along this path.