

Pop, why do you hunt deer?

by Jack Boswell

I am a SSAA member and a former contributor over many years. Recently, my third-eldest grandson, Isaac, asked me, "Pop, why do you hunt deer?" Apart from the easy replies of "Because I enjoy it" and "It provides us with food", I realised that I had to go away and think about it properly. I ended up writing Isaac a letter and thought that I would also send it in to the SSAA to help other parents, grandparents and friends explain the benefits and enjoyment of recreational hunting and shooting with their youngsters or simply others who aren't familiar with our chosen pastime.

Dear Isaac,

Last time that we spoke together, you asked me that important question, which deserves a better, more complete answer than I was able to give at the time.

You will recall that I said something about the family tradition. My father was a hunter; his father and grandfather were hunters going back several generations. A relative of ours in the early 20th century was a famous shooter and London gunsmith.

The very first artists were hunters. Some of them left beautiful paintings of deer and other game animals on cave walls in France and Spain. These paintings and others of men hunting have been dated at about 30,000 years old. That's a long time ago!

But there is more. Before 10,000 years ago, practically all people in the world were hunters or hunter/gatherers. That was the only way that people got their food. There were no farms either, and no shop to buy food - not even a Big Mac! Some 200,000 years ago, all people like us lived in Africa and all were hunters.

The main reason that I hunt is because I want to. I like to hunt in the same way that I like to sing. You may have seen a video-clip from the film *Anchors Aweigh!* where Jerry, the Warner Bros mouse (from *Tom & Jerry*), dances with Gene Kelly to a fairy story called *The Little King Who Couldn't Dance*, and the king tries to stop his subjects from dancing.

What would the world be like without dancing or music? Shooting is like dancing and hunting is like music - they are part of me. Hunting especially is an essential part of being human. Most sports are really substitutes for the hunting drive. Look up the word 'game'. Tennis and football are great games in which the players practise the same sort of skills, such as aiming, that are needed for hunting. Have you ever watched kittens or puppies playing? They too are honing their skills for hunting. As a grown-up, I need to continue to go hunting before I get too old.

Hunting gives me satisfaction, maybe even fulfilment. When I shoot a deer, nothing is really wasted. Venison is very lean and very healthy for the diet. It is also extremely expensive to buy. When I shoot a trophy stag, the game is significantly value added.



Jack Boswell with his grandsons Jake, Joshua, Kael and Isaac in Jack's shed.

The deer with the best antlers are very old grandfather deer; they have already lived most of their lives. If the deer seen through my binocular does not have better antlers than ones I have already taken, I choose not to take it; unless it is a cull. I shoot culls just for the meat, and I like to keep my freezer well-stocked with venison.

Whenever I am feeling a little sad, I like to sit in my trophy room and I feel much better. A trophy is better than a great photo. It is a celebration of the magnificence of the animal; a beauty that will last much longer than a deer's life expectancy. It is also a celebration of a memorable hunt. My hunting mates enjoy each other's trophies. We do not think that deer hunting is some kind of competition, and none of my trophies have been scored.

Though I believe deer are the most challenging of all game, I am neither a great shot nor a great hunter. But I have been very lucky and have had a great deal of help. I have been fairly persistent and have hunted for more than 50 years. Trophy-class deer are very different to just any deer. It is like comparing Under 7 football with the State of Origin.

The animals that I shoot die quickly and with much less pain than death by any other cause that I could name. Animal welfare is very important to hunters. The animal rights movement has little credibility among real conservationists.

Feral animals are domesticated stock that have gone wild. This includes feral cattle, buffalo, horses, goats, pigs, dogs and cats. Indian mynahs, starlings and sparrows, together with cane toads, rats and mice, are simply vermin, whereas rabbits, hares and foxes are small game. All of these animals are pests when they are not managed properly. They can be economic pests to the farmers and can be very dangerous animals in any state. Strangely, they are protected in national parks in New South Wales.

I hunt animals for a reason. The RSPCA needs to kill animals sometime for very good reasons, as do some farmers. There are some people who say that animals are equal to humans. I cannot agree with them, as I know that you are much more important. However, I do think that a lion has an equal right to hunt as I do because we are both hunters.

I am glad that you asked me this very important question. I hope that it helps you understand your old Pop.