

One would think hunters would be a little more humble, perhaps even embarrassed, about the ease with which they kill animals. For many big-game animals such as bison, pronghorn antelope, and bighorn sheep, the hunter success rate is nearly 100 percent. It's so easy to kill mourning doves that the Fish and Wildlife Service sets the daily bag limit (kill limit) at 15. And on some hunting preserves, hunters shoot animals from their cars or trucks, or pet the animals before taking aim.

The killing is only likely to get easier. Not satisfied by the current state of overkill, hunters seem to be engaged in a unilateral arms race. Besides making use of easy-to-handle, easy-to-load, and easy-to-aim shotguns and other firearms, hunters now pick from a top line of sophisticated archery equipment. These days, a hunter can line up an animal with a scope on his crossbow, and send an arrow into the flesh of an animal with a force capable of penetrating metal.

What makes the sport so unfair is that the animals don't pose a reciprocal threat to the hunters. Animals have only their mobility and their senses as defenses. Of course, animal "retribution" is not unknown during hunting season. As reported recently by *The Washington Times*, a hunter shot and wounded a passing Canada goose, but unexpectedly the plummeting bird turned kamikaze and slammed into the head of the hunter, knocking him out. **Despite these rare instances of justice**, it's clear that the greatest danger hunters face is not from killer geese or other animal vigilantes, but from fellow hunters, who often indiscriminately scatter shot in the direction of their **coreligionists**.

But a facile, safe, and unfair sport is hardly an image the macho hunter can be proud of. There must be danger, there must be challenge. As a response, the hunter has altered his inglorious reality by entering the world of fantasy, imagining the hunt as a life-and-death struggle. Fortunately for the hunter—who is, by definition, short on imagination—the world of fiction is only as far away as the nearest magazine rack, where the various hunting journals—*Outdoor Life*, *Field and Stream*, *The American Hunter*, *Sports Afield*, and *Guns and Ammo*—take up space.

The most common adventure tales involve bears. With titles that range from "Chronicle of a Bear Hunt" to "Corridor of Terror," bear stories in hunting journals may be more

## Animal Retribution?

populous than bears in the woods. Said *Sports Afield's* Gerald Almy (May '87), "Perhaps it is their [the bear's] total unpredictability that's so fascinating. And at no time is this unpredictability more obvious or more exasperating than when you pursue them in the ultimate sporting way—by attempting to find the animals in their natural habitat and approach them within shooting distance, unaided by bait or hound." Perhaps the hunt would be even more fascinating were Almy unaided by bullet and scope.

Some hunters contend that pursuing any kind of animal in bear country with a firearm is hazardous. In an article called "Dinner Bell Bears" (Jan. '88), Jack Danielson, not to be confused with the bourbon he probably drank while writing his story, claims that bears are attracted by the crack of the gun. He states, "When a rifle fires, these bears come running. They want venison, and they're willing to kill for it."

Other hunters claim that deer hunting, whether or not it's done in bear country, is often a man-versus-beast adventure. An article in *Outdoor Life* titled "When Deer Become Dangerous" (March '88) states that "some observers estimate that whitetails and mule deer have killed more people in the United States than black bears and grizzly bears combined." The article adds that, "Hardly a week goes by that the editors of OUTDOOR LIFE do not receive a 'This Happened To Me' story on the subject of close calls with deer."

Here is one such story: "In Utah, bowhunter Melvin Laws wounded a mule deer buck with a 25-yard shot, then got the shock of his life when the deer rushed him. Laws ran behind a quaking aspen as the buck buried his antlers in the trunk."

Not satisfied with trying to drive off those who try to kill them, deer, the author claims, may even threaten people who try to help them.

"Someone had found two large southern Michigan bucks with their antlers locked together in combat. A film crew taped away while a biologist and a veterinarian worked to disengage the battlers. . . Suddenly the bucks broke free, and one of them, probably the loser, ran for the woods. The other stood his ground, head down and antlers

pointed menacingly at his benefactors. For a tense half minute or so, the buck seemed undecided about what to do; finally, he turned tail and fled. It would not have surprised me had that buck attacked the people at the scene. Why? Because deer can be dangerous."

Then again, so can a fly, or **an ant who** gets in your ear.

But if it's not deer, it's some other animal. In *The American Hunter*, a journal of the National Rifle Association, Harrison O'Connor in his article "Rooshed by a Football With Teeth" (Aug. '88) said that "in the Arizona desert, a bowhunt for javelina proved more exciting than I ever imagined." The javelina he encountered rooshed (charged) him three times. The hunter did admit though that "He [the javelina] didn't really know where I was; javelina have poor eyesight." Taking a shot each time the animal blindly ran in his vicinity, the author killed him on the third pass, after hitting a rock and a cactus on the previous two shots.

According to other observers, some well-known herbivores might be better classed as man-eaters. Squirrels may be one such species should a story (June '85) in *Guns and Ammo* be accurate. Sitting in a park one day, a hunter observed a man pick up a squirrel. He described it as follows:

"the man quickly reached out with his right hand and grabbed the squirrel from behind. . . . With a quickness approaching the speed of light, the rodent twisted his head around. Its mouth was moving like a sewing machine, and it ripped open the web of the man's hand from his thumb to his index finger."

The man then let the squirrel go and ran back to his tent. The hunter continued:

"the man slowly walked out with his wife supporting him. He was now rather pale, and his badly bitten hand was wrapped in a white towel that was rapidly turning blood red. . . . I remained seated for a while, unable to finish my lunch. I was having difficulty adjusting to what I had just seen. Obviously, there was a lot more to the nature of these animals than I had just seen on TV or at the movies. While still thinking things over, I heard a rustling sound near me. I looked up to find that another ground squirrel had found its way on to my table and was sampling what was left of my lunch. I got up slowly and backed away. I didn't want anything to do with this little furry meat slicer."

A host of other animal attack stories had to be edited out. They were simply too gruesome and too frightening to appear in this magazine.

—Wayne Pacelle