

WHY HUNT?

From the coast to the mountains, year after year, North Carolina hunters anxiously await the coming hunting seasons. Most set aside a few days or a weekend and some reserve several weeks to a month or more. Rarely is anything else planned that would interrupt the “hunting months” because for many hunting is far too valuable to ignore, and for others, Hunting Matters more than anything else.

However, in a day and age when a variety of low-cost, readily available food is nearly everywhere, why would anyone consider battling the elements, losing precious sleep, missing work, and at times, spending large sums of money in an attempt to get sustenance the “hard” way? In order to answer this question, we must first understand the motivations for hunting.

Motivations for Hunting

Rob Southwick, of South Associates, oversees monthly hunter, shooter, and angler surveys developed by the organization. In a 2007 survey, hunters and fishermen were asked the question, “What motivates people to hunt and fish?” Hunter’s responses showed:

- Get away to nature (42.8%)
- Good family activity/good way to spend time with friends (20.3%)
- The challenge (15.5%)
- To relax (15.4%)
- Other (4.3%)
- Don’t know (1.6%)

In addition, Dr. Bob Norton provided insight as to what motivates hunters to hunt in his book entitled, *The Hunter: Developmental Stages and Ethics*. The book is a compilation of interviews from over 5000 individual hunters. In Chapter Five, the focus question was; “Why do you hunt?” Hunter interviews revealed the following four primary motivations for hunting:

- 1) **Everyone desired time alone:** “Oftentimes, they (*hunters*) mentioned the peace they felt in the quiet of the night before daylight or as the sunset and the woods filled with darkness; the fact that they were able to think so clearly and that problems seemed to have answers; what it meant to just relax and know they were part of the world around them with no need to impress anyone or produce. They were talking about being at peace with

one's self. Everyone needs their quiet place where they can go to be alone. Experienced hunters find that place while they hunt" (pgs. 113-114).

- 2) **Everyone desired time with others:** "The anticipation and preparation for the hunt that included their family. The meeting of fellow hunters in the hours before daylight, the anticipation of meeting again during the day or after the day's hunt ended. Pre-season and post-season meetings over coffee, sometimes a night out on the town, all centered around knowing, depending upon, and enjoying each other. Hunters hunt so they can experience relationships" (pgs. 114-115).
- 3) **Everyone desired to connect with the land:** "Hunters study and learn the land and develop a keen appreciation of it. They expressed an informed understanding of how nature depends on cycles of life, and that as hunters they needed to respect the balances. They said the land is capable of producing only a given amount, and by forming a partnership with the land, through good conservation practices and reasonable harvests, we can continue to have good hunting" All people have a basic need to connect with the land. Hunters hunt to experience the land" (pgs. 116-117).
- 4) **Everyone desired to be part of harvesting:** "They (*hunters*) talked about specific hunts and often related experiences of taking game. The hunt itself was explained from the preparation, the knowledge, the time in the field, the energy it consumed, the obstacles that had to be overcome, and then finally the taking of the bird or whitetail, which resulted in the final reward, feeling of accomplishment, and the celebration. Harvest is when it all comes together-the planning, the investment, the risks and then the gathering in of the rewards. It is a basic need for everyone and hunters hunt to experience it" (pgs. 118-120).

In closing the chapter, Dr. Norton states, "The four basic motivators, time for self, relating to others, connection to the land, and to experience the harvest, are intrinsic aspects of the human condition. Hunters have found a way to positively express each of them.

Hunting is Personal

The late William G. Tapply, author and dedicated outdoorsman from Hancock, New Hampshire, offered an understanding into why hunters hunt through a feature article of his own personal reflections entitled, *“Why I Hunt.”* The following are a few excerpts from that article:

“I hunt because my father hunted, and he took me with him, and so we built a bond that has endured past his death, and because his father hunted, and his father's father, and all of the fathers in my line and yours, as far back as those fathers who invented spears and axes and recorded their adventures with pictures on the walls of caves.

“I hunt because it reminds me that in nature there is a food chain where everything eats and is, in turn, eaten, where birth, survival, and reproduction give full meaning to life, where death is ever-present, and where the only uncertainty is the time and manner of that death. Hunting reminds me that I am integrated into that cycle, not separated from it or above it.”

“I hunt because, in the words of Ortega Y Gasset, it gives me “a vacation from the human condition,” which, all by itself, is a full and satisfactory reason.”

Hunting: Benefiting Body, Mind, and Soul

No doubt hunters choose to hunt for a variety of reasons from basic to complex. The choice to hunt or not is a personal one not unlike all the other choices we make on a daily basis. Whether hunter or non-hunter, all of us seek to find places of peace, solace, understanding, meaning, and connection in our lives. To many, hunting provides these special places along with time to reflect on yesterday, enjoy the moment, and contemplate tomorrow all while exercising and refreshing body, mind, and soul.

Why Hunt? Why Not?

