

On the fence

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By JOHN L. SLOAN

The debate goes on. Should hunting behind a high fence be legal? There are those in favor of it and they see absolutely nothing wrong with it. There are those who are diametrically opposed to hunting behind a high fence and are of the opinion that those who do so should be tarred and feathered.

The question is one mostly of two view points. First, is it ethical to hunt an animal that is, in effect penned and unable to escape? Second, should it be legal to do so? Now also in consideration is the possibility that penned animals give rise to diseases, which may then be spread, to the wild population.

That is another situation. **Let me right now state my position.** *I think that if there is sufficient acreage involved for the animal to evade the hunter and the baiting or feeding of the animal is not involved, thereby providing fair chase in my opinion, then I have no problem with it.*

Now let me also state I have hunted behind a high fence on two occasions. Once on 400 acres in Ohio for a Corsican ram, some exotic type of sheep and it was certainly a challenging hunt. I stalked for close to four hours before I was afforded a shot. Well, maybe it wasn't all that challenging.

The other time was on 42,000 acres in Texas and it was a miserable hunt for Axis deer.

It was no contest. I was done in less than an hour because bait was involved. Without the bait-spot and stalk-it would have been a fine hunt with archery equipment. But I sat in a 12-foot ladder stand, the feeder went off, the buck came running in and I arrowed him.

As a result of both those hunts, I can say that I, me personally, have no desire to hunt behind a fence but I certainly don't care if others do. It is none of my business what others prefer to do.

After all, almost all African hunting today is behind some sort of high fence. However, in most cases, the area involved is large enough to provide at least a modicum of a sporting chance.

However, it should be noted that in the overwhelming percentage of the time, unless he or she is terribly inept, the hunters do kill the animal they are after. I don't care. That does not bother me.

Two things bother me: I am concerned by the importation of exotic animals. Although there has been no reports of them bringing in any diseases, at least to my knowledge, for me it is of some concern.

I am also concerned by the high dollar sale of huge indigenous animals to "sportsmen" or "sportswomen" whereby the hunter may actually look at a scrapbook of pictures and pick out the animal they want to kill. These animals, often alleged to be pumped up on steroids, command astronomical prices. Seldom if ever are they not killed and the check is not written.

In some states, this practice is illegal. In some, there are no controls or stringent inspection. I know of one operation and I am not making this up, where the hunter is encourage to enjoy the beautiful scenery on the 11 acres of the "preserve".

He is seated in a comfortable shooting house 50 yards from the feeder. The shot he must take goes right past the bedroom window of the owner's house. I am not making that up. I saw the advertisement.

Only the Safari Club International will recognize any trophy taken behind high fence. Of course, they will also recognize just about any animal for trophy status.

However, to me, free ranging animals with a minimum of 1,000 acres in which to roam unimpeded and no feeding or baiting takes place would constitute fair chase.

Should it be recognized by the two main record keeping organizations for trophy status? I do not care. It does not concern me what others do. To me, trophy status is completely in the eyes of the hunter.

However, one must also factor in the species of animal being hunted. It is far easier to stalk a herd of Kudu than it is to hunt a solitary, mature whitetail buck on 1,000 acres.

Therefore, though the debate rages on, sometimes quite violently, I remain on the fence about the whole thing. I figure it is up to the personal standards of the hunter.

If one wishes to pursue an animal that just stepped off a truck into an 11-acre pen that is his business. The same holds true if a hunter buys a \$15,000, 225-inch whitetail buck and wants to call it a new world record. I do not care. However, I do not agree. I may straddle the fence but I will not hunt behind it.

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