

What is a canned hunt?

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There has been much talk in some areas of late regarding canned hunting. It got a push when a man supposedly shot a deer on an Ohio deer preserve, alleged to have over 600 inches of antlers. I do not know if any of that is true but it sure got folks talking.

What is a canned hunt?

To explain it for the purpose of discussion, it is a "hunt" where the person pays an enormous fee to shoot an animal raised or kept much like a farm, animal in a small enclosure. The animal is bred just for that purpose and has no chance. In other words, it is about like opening a can of soup-a canned hunt.

Naturally it is deplorable and in no way even hunting. The two major record keeping organizations, Pope and Young for bowhunters only and Boone and Crockett, do not recognize any animal not taken by fair chase. Even so, there are a growing number of people plunking down the cash to do just that. Where do we draw the line? What is fair chase, what is not? Some individuals think hunting from a tree stand is not fair chase. They feel hunting any animal behind a fence is not a fair chase hunt. How do you go about defining fair chase?

Let us start with the obvious. One person hunts an animal in a one-acre enclosure. Eventually, that hunter is going to kill that animal. The animal cannot escape. Not fair chase.

Now let us expand that enclosure to ten acres. It might take longer but the outcome is still the same. The hunter will get his animal. Not fair chase. But, what about 50-acres? In a one on one encounter in 50-acres, the outcome is not certain. However, it is not fair chase, at least not to me.

The hunter still has too much advantage because the animal cannot escape. But is all canned hunting behind a fence? Can the use of bait constitute a canned hunt or does it depend on where you are hunting? It is said in some areas, bait is the only way you could hunt. I know several "hunters" who cannot kill a deer without using bait or hunting over a food plot. Does a food plot constitute a canned hunt?

What about 1,000 fenced acres? Is a 20,000-acre ranch behind a high fence fair chase? What is the requirement? How about an island of 3,000 acres. Is a hunt there fair chase? Those animals cannot escape. Is it fair chase?

It amazes me that among hunters, experienced hunters, there seems to be a problem deciding what a canned hunt is and what fair chase is. I do not have that problem. To me it is simple. The game must have at least as much chance to avoid me as I have to killing it.

If the animal is a wild animal, born in the wild and living in the wild and free to move about and avoid hunters, that is fair chase. Can the animal avoid hunters and die of old age or predation by other animals? If so, that is fair chase.

If the outcome is pre-ordained. If that animal is going to be killed by the hunter who paid to do so, that is a canned hunt. To go to a farm where a deer or elk has been bred to be sold to a hunter, injected with steroids to improve the body size and antlers then, released into a small enclosure that is a canned hunt. Almost any hunt in the United States for a non-native animal, is a canned hunt. There are a few exceptions.

I have been on two hunts behind high fence. One was on a 43,000-acre ranch, the other on 450-acres. One, to me was a canned hunt, the other more than fair chase.

Surprisingly, the one on the huge ranch was a canned hunt. The animals had no chance. It was a hunt for Axis deer. They were imported and kept for the sole purpose of being killed by someone who paid big money. The hunt on the smaller property was for Barbados sheep. It was as challenging as you could want. One was in Texas, a state known for canned hunts. The other was in Ohio, a state becoming well known for canned hunts. The Texas hunt was a joke.

Why the concern in Tennessee?

Simply because there are some who want deer farming to be legal in Tennessee. No matter what guise they may use to argue their point, if deer farming here became legal, canned hunting would soon follow. Who knows what else would follow in the form of disease.

The conversation, however, mostly is about ethics. Ethical versus unethical hunts. Canned hunts versus fair chase. I suppose each hunter has his or her own line in the sand.

Where is the line? If you take your foot and kick up a small mound of rocks, that may be a pile.

Now, one at a time you add rocks to the pile. When does it become a hill? How many rocks will it take to become a mountain?

From an acre to ten acres to 20,000-acres, where does it cease to be canned hunting and become fair chase?

Just something to think about while you are in the woods this weekend. Is your hunt canned or is it like mine, a crapshoot?

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