

Thirty Years



Hunters threatened
to shoot my truck.

Better than former threats
that I might get shot.

Photo by Alfred Francesconi

For 30 years I have survived the annual massacres called hunting seasons. I lived 50 years without being aware of what goes on in the name of sport. My eyes were closed and my mind numb. It wasn't until I started Unexpected Wildlife Refuge that my eyes opened and my mind woke up.

It was when NO TRESPASSING signs on our refuge were first torn down that I became aware of how hunting infringed on human rights as well as animal rights. And it was when I first witnessed "deer drives" that I began to realize just how unfair and barbaric hunting is. Fifty men arriving in vehicles and being dropped off at strategic spots along a border to which the deer would be driven. Conductors of the hunt conversing with walkie-talkies to report where the deer were and in which direction they might move. "I need another silent driver," or, "Two of you go to the north and south flanks" (to make sure that a deer veering off to either side could be shot).

Sometimes the drive was silent—moving the deer slowly without spooking them. More often drivers hooted, clanged on pans or fired guns to panic the deer into a dash toward waiting guns.

Although, after 30 years, local hunters have, for the most part, stopped verbal abuse aimed at discouraging us, they still line up next to refuge borders ready to shoot any buck who tries to reach a safe haven. And threats persist, though fewer and more veiled. This deer season a hunter twice warned me that if I drove on the dirt road that borders the refuge my *truck* might get shot. Better than former

threats that I might get shot.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that last year 76 million citizens watched, photographed, and/or fed wildlife without feeling a need to kill, while 14 million hunted and 34.5 million fished. Those figures sound encouraging, but those millions who hunt and fish are destroying the balance of nature and decimating the animals whom wildlife lovers would like to protect and watch.

Unfortunately, those of us who deplore hunting have not yet organized a concerted effort to gain control of the wildlife that belongs to all of us. Each year hunting interests (state Fish and Game departments) meet to set dates for the coming seasons, based on an estimated supply of animals and the demands of license-buying hunters, trappers and fisherman, who have the sole say in wildlife matters.

In our refuge we have more than a dozen wood-duck nesting boxes, most of which produce annual broods. Of these ducklings many grow up to leave the refuge, and may be counted by Fish and Game as surplus to be shot. Thus my efforts to provide for these beautiful ducks play into the hands of the hunters.

We are imperfect beings in an imperfect world. But it is time that the 76 million of us who value wildlife as our neighbors, with a right to life, should make our views known and demand a voice in what happens. It is time to become aware of what's going on, and to make ourselves heard. If each one of us would attend Fish and Wildlife hearings in our respective states, and insist on being heard, the next 30 years might see a tremendous change in what happens to wildlife throughout our land. □ □

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmifci