

# Dreadful/Delightful Killing: The Contested Nature of Duck Hunting

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## Abstract

Hunting ducks with a firearm has become increasingly contested in industrialized and urbanized contemporary societies. In southern New Zealand, an area that maintains strong connections to rural life ways, duck shooting is still a very popular activity. However, even duck shooters living in this region are increasingly finding that they must justify an activity their grandparents practiced without compunction. This paper considers ethical discourses associated with the killing of ducks, particularly the ways in which people who shoot ducks construct the act of killing as an activity that can be ethically justified. As this paper will show, duck hunters assert that they have a more realistic and appropriate view of nature and animal life cycles than the average anti-hunter who might criticize them. New Zealand duck hunters also embed their hunting activities within a discourse of wetland conservation, arguing that they do far more to preserve and develop wetlands than do non-hunters. This paper concludes that duck hunters' understandings of nature are intrinsic to the ethical discourses that underpin duck hunting activities in New Zealand.

## Keywords

ethical discourses of hunting, nature, duck shooting, wetland conservation, New Zealand

## Introduction

*I cannot remember the shot; I remember only my unspeakable delight when my first duck hit the snowy ice with a thud and lay there, belly up, red legs kicking* (Aldo Leopold, 1949/1987, p. 121).

*Sport hunting is immoral; it should be made illegal. Hunters are persecutors of nature who should be prosecuted* (Joy Williams, 1995, p. 265).

In the above quotation, Leopold (1949/1987) describes the delight he felt on shooting his first duck. Although duck hunters understand this delight, many nonhunters do not. It is perhaps perplexing that the man credited with developing the term, "ecological conscience" (Knight & Riedel, 2002), could also have been such a fervent and enthusiastic hunter. How can taking "delight" in the killing of nonhuman animals go hand-in-hand with caring for "nature"? For many anti-hunters, this delight associated with killing an animal is incomprehensible. As the above quotation from Williams (1995) reveals, hunting is understood by some people to harm not only the hunted species but also "nature" itself.

Protests and opposition to hunting are growing phenomena in contemporary industrialized countries. Hunters of all kinds are finding they must explain and justify themselves, as previously unquestioned hunting activities are increasingly constructed by non-hunters as unethical and cruel. This paper explores the contested moral terrain of duck hunting in contemporary New Zealand society and seeks to illustrate how duck hunters, in the face of a growing anti-hunting critique, construct the shooting of ducks as an acceptable—even "delightful"—activity.

Franklin (2002) argues that over the past few decades, "we have seen startling transformations in the relations between humanity and the natural world" (p. 2). These transformations arise from concern about the impact of humans on the earth and the rapid destruction of the world's biodiversity (Wilson, 1988), together with emerging moral discourses based on ideas of "environmentalism" (Milton, 1993; Dryzek, 1997). This greening of society imposes expectations that to be a good world citizen one must express a sensitive, concerned attitude toward nature and a humane and caring consideration of animals.

Nonhuman animals in the wild, in particular, are considered to be closer to nature than domesticated animals (whether they are companion animals or livestock) and thus often qualify for a special kind of reverence and care (Dizard, 1999). Of course, not all wildlife qualifies for this respect, and there are many instances in which people and wildlife come into conflict (Knight, 2000). Increasingly in Western societies, however, there is a new understanding that it is the human invasion of nature that has created this conflict. Cronon (1995) describes a dramatic example of this invasion from Sierra Nevada, where a young woman out jogging near her home was stalked and mauled to death by a female mountain lion. The lion was quickly hunted down and shot to ensure she did not kill again. Shortly after this tragic episode, two public appeals were started, one for the woman's two small children, and one for the lion's 7-month-old cub. The first appeal raised \$9,000 for the two children; the second collected \$21,000 for the cub. Cronon concludes

from this story that “the mountain lion can serve as a token of nature’s savagery—or as an innocent victim of human beings who in their efforts to live closer to nature unthinkingly invade the lion’s home” (p. 50). This story emphasizes that humans assign different meanings to nature—particularly in the form of moral fables—and that animals are often key components in these fables.

Like mountain lions, ducks also serve as metaphors in moral fables relating to nature and the environment. Furthermore, they generate conflicting moral understandings through these metaphors. This moral ambiguity is particularly clear in the tensions and disagreements between different groups over the hunting of ducks in New Zealand.

### **What is Duck Hunting?**

In common usage, duck hunting describes various activities that actually include shooting not only ducks but also several different water bird species. A more traditional term is “wildfowling,” although this is less commonly used today. It is important to realize that duck hunting is a term that cannot be understood purely as a description of a hunting activity: It also encapsulates broad and varied cultural activities associated with shooting water bird species.

Fish and Game New Zealand (the organization charged with collecting hunting fees and enforcing game-bird hunting regulations) uses the term, “game-bird hunting,” to incorporate two distinct activities: waterfowl and upland game hunting. Those waterfowl species that can be hunted include various ducks: the Mallard Duck; Grey Duck; Shoveler Duck; and Paradise Duck—along with Black Swan; Canada Goose, and Pukeko (or Swamphen). Upland game includes quail, pheasant and chukor.<sup>1</sup> Fish and Game New Zealand provides a game-bird license that permits the hunting of both upland and waterfowl species—within restricted bag limits and seasonal constraints—and these restrictions vary from region to region in New Zealand. Duck shooting or hunting waterfowl is a distinct pastime and has commonly identified social activities associated with it, whereas upland game is much less so. For example, unlike the opening of the upland game season, the opening weekend for duck hunting has enormous social significance attached to it.

In many ways, the traditional North American configuration of hunting is similar to New Zealand’s, where hunting animals in the wild connects to ideas of escaping from the constraints of civilization, testing and proving “manhood,” and evoking images of becoming “one with nature.” The American historical figure Daniel Boone epitomizes this ideal of “man”<sup>2</sup> conquering and taming the wild (Jasper & Nelkin 1992, p. 83). In New Zealand, a parallel image can be found in the writings of Crump (1960, 1992), in which iconic

characters revel in hunting a variety of different creatures to show masculine independence and “living off the land,” while simultaneously rejecting (or at least not relying on) modern conveniences and civilization.

Until recently, the skills and lifestyles (however much fictionalized and romanticized) of Daniel Boone and Barry Crump have been widely admired, even if not actively emulated by many Americans or New Zealanders. These images of stoic and resourceful men, however, have recently been challenged—particularly as the hunting practices so closely associated with this type of lifestyle have come to be interpreted in far less positive ways.<sup>3</sup>

## **Methods**

Drawing on doctoral research carried out over a period of 4 years, this paper utilizes field work along with 40 in-depth qualitative interviews carried out with duck hunters living primarily in southern New Zealand. This paper also incorporates historical and contemporary literature and analysis of media sources to contextualize the field work material. Information on the statutory requirements placed on duck hunters is readily available; however, deeper insights—as to the social and cultural practices, motivations, or attitudes that duck hunters hold with regard to their duck-hunting activities—are not. Although it is possible to gather some information through telephone surveys and focus groups, duck hunting is a pastime that can be usefully explored through ethnographic research. Given that my aim at the start of this project was to better understand the social meanings and activities of duck hunters, I determined this could be best achieved through observing and participating in duck-hunting activities. The following citation from Brewer (2000) provides a useful definition of ethnography, which fits with the approach taken in my ethnographic field work:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally. (p. 6)

Data gathered from interviews and field work for this research were coded in terms of various emergent themes using ATLAS (a qualitative software tool). The in-depth, tape-recorded interviews were a valuable resource that complemented the field notes taken during, and after, field work. Extracts from interviews are presented in this paper, with pseudonyms provided for the par-

ticipants. An important question I wanted to address in this research was why do duck hunters partake in, and presumably enjoy, activities that revolve around killing animals and how do they respond to criticism of those activities.

### **The Contemporary Contestation of Hunting Practices**

The debate about duck hunting in New Zealand is connected to wider international disputes regarding hunting in general. In Australia, where duck-hunting activities have historically gone uncontested, there are now extremely hostile protests, which—in some places—have led to a variety of hunting practices being banned (Munro, 1997; Franklin, 1996, 1999). This tension and disparity in moral understandings around hunting is also seen in other types of hunting in the United States, where anti-hunters and hunters have increasingly come into conflict over the past 30 years (Dizard, 1999, 2003; Heberlein, 1987).

In New Zealand, criticism of duck hunting has become more vocal over the past few decades. Whereas shooting ducks was once considered a “natural” form of food provisioning, it is now increasingly viewed as “unnatural,” unnecessary, and unethical. Since the 1990s—during the opening weekend of duck shooting, in particular—this criticism has developed into demonstrations from anti-hunting protesters. The increasing antipathy toward duck hunting can also be found in the “Letters to the Editor” sections of New Zealand newspapers, where correspondents articulate a perception of duck hunting as “unethical” and “cruel.” The following example indicates that some individuals have little liking for duck-hunting activities—or, indeed, the duck hunters themselves:

Why, in these enlightened post-colonial times, do we still have the annual carnage of duck shooting and allow heavily armed shooters to wander at will, taking pot shots at any poor duck, swan or goose that does not spot them first? . . . It is very disconcerting to bump into heavily armed shooters while taking the dog for a walk and it is sickening to see badly shot birds lying half dead and in pain . . . and it is downright infuriating that the rights of a shooter who has paid for a licence . . . and follows a few minor rules has the right to kill a generous quantity of birds in front of someone like me who finds the whole “sport” disgusting. (Bird lover, 2003a, p. 14)

This letter illustrates increasingly contentious attitudes toward duck hunting in contemporary New Zealand society. First, Bird Lover clearly expresses a perception that living in “enlightened post-colonial times” constitutes a societal shift since colonial times in what is considered to be acceptable treatment of animals. In other words, this person understands a “modern” society has

different relationships with animals than those of the past. It is also obvious that the correspondent perceives the shooting of ducks as a cruel activity, leaving birds suffering and “lying half dead in pain” and can find no justification for what the writer clearly views as a “disgusting” sport. In the context of contemporary duck-shooting practices, it is particularly important to consider the recent ascendance in popularity of the animal rights’ movement, which has had a major influence on the configuration of hunting discourses.

### **Animal Rights and Anti-hunting Discourses**

As Yearley (1993) observes,

... during the late 1980s the vocabulary of animal rights and animal welfare rapidly entered everyday language, indicating a fundamental change in common ways of considering animals and signaling an expansion in the kinds of being held to have moral rights. (p. 61).

Concern about the rights of animals has become the basis for much of the anti-hunting rhetoric and a key component of what many duck hunters perceive and experience as threats to, or repudiation of, their hunting practices.

The philosopher Singer (1975/1990) has been particularly influential in recent debates regarding ethical issues and animals. Singer advocates the type of Utilitarianism philosophy first put forward by Jeremy Bentham in the early nineteenth century (Jasper & Nelkin, 1992). Singer asserts that the principle of equal consideration of interests should include species outside human beings—if those species have the “capacity for suffering and/or enjoyment or happiness” (p. 7). Regarding duck hunting, Singer emphasizes the Utilitarian argument and suggests that even if a duck is killed painlessly it is wrong to take away the pleasure the duck was having in living a “pleasant life”:

A duck shot by a hunter (making the shaky assumption that the shooter can be relied upon to kill the duck instantly) has probably had a pleasant life, but the shooting of duck does not lead to its replacement by another. Unless the duck population is at the maximum that can be sustained by the available food supply, the killing of a duck ends a pleasant life without starting another, and is for that reason wrong on straight utilitarian grounds. (Singer, 1993, pp. 133, 134)

Singer’s (1993) argument begins to reveal the divergent interpretations that anti-hunters and hunters have regarding how animals live. Singer suggests that a duck shot by a hunter has, in all likelihood, been leading a “pleasant life.” Many hunters, however, frame this scenario quite differently. In their con-

struction of duck existence, hunters see nature as being “red in tooth and claw.” Further, if not killed by a shotgun pellet, then a duck would most likely die a long and lingering death from starvation, or die violently through predation. As one hunter explained during this research:

Ducks don't have a very pretty life. Many die an agonizing slow death from starvation. . . . And a lot of the juvies [juveniles] are grabbed by hawks or eels. . . . Those anti's [anti-hunting protesters] think it is all sunshine and happiness but the reality is that nature is much more gruesome (Doug).

In addition, duck hunters also counter Singer's (1993) argument about balancing duck populations by claiming that because of hunters' wetland-conservation efforts, a killed duck will be “replaced” by either another duck or by some other species of bird. (Duck hunters and wetland conservation will be explored further below.)

### **Opposition to Duck Hunting in New Zealand**

The most well-recognized group associated with the animal rights activism in New Zealand is Save Animals From Exploitation (SAFE). This organization, founded in 1932, began a campaign specifically directed against duck hunters and received some assistance from the Australian Animal Liberation organization that had carried out high profile protests in Victoria, Australia, during the late 1980s. Munro (1997) discusses the Australian case. In New Zealand during 1991, SAFE gained national media coverage when protesters used sirens and drums to scare ducks away from Lake Ellesmere, a popular location close to the city of Christchurch (Hunters help wetland conservation, 2001, p. 1).

Although these protests are now a regular feature of opening morning in New Zealand, they have not generated the same degree of antipathy against duck hunters as in Australia, where duck shooting has been banned in several states (RSPCA, 2002). This is partly due to the New Zealand media's coverage of duck hunting. While animal rights protests against duck hunting have been shown on television and reported through newspapers throughout the country, media coverage often portrays duck hunting as a traditional, almost quaint, rural activity.<sup>4</sup> In news and human interest stories relating to duck shooting on the two main national television channels, duck hunters are most often presented as friendly, “ordinary” New Zealanders, and personal details and comments that are revealed about them add to this impression.<sup>5</sup>

Duck shooting is, therefore, not framed in New Zealand as a serious “social problem,” as Munro (1997) found in Australia. In New Zealand, in contrast

to Australian events, the “confrontations” between duck hunters and animal rights activists have (until the present time, at least) been presented as contrasting discursive positions, rather than a duality between a noble cause against a miscreant one. However, despite these differences between New Zealand and Australia, the constant presence of anti-hunting discourses is a crucial dynamic in both countries.<sup>6</sup> Over the past 30 years (especially in the past decade since the SAFE protests), these discourses have configured important changes in duck hunting practices in New Zealand. In the following section, I discuss the counter discourse mobilized by duck hunters in the face of this opposition.

### **Legitimizing the Moral Landscape of Duck Hunting**

In an effort to counter anti-hunting discourses appearing in the 1990s, Fish and Game New Zealand mobilized a specific counter discourse with an emphasis on the importance of ethical hunting codes. While a “sporting code” associated with hunting has been in place for nearly two centuries,<sup>7</sup> ethical hunting codes have developed more recently as a specific response to the criticisms of hunting. These codes incorporate a strict hunting etiquette that demands the following: killing be done “carefully,” animals be killed “cleanly,” and hunters behave “responsibly.” *Fish and Game New Zealand* (n.d.) urges duck hunters to follow these codes of ethical conduct in their hunting literature and game- bird hunting guides. In a hunting supplement published in a southern New Zealand newspaper, for example, hunters are reminded that the long-term viability of duck hunting is dependent on how the general non-hunting public perceives hunters and their behavior:

In today’s society, many members of the public have grown to regard firearms and hunters with suspicion and fear. The future of duck hunting will largely depend on the public image of hunters. (*Fish & game 1999 news*, 1999, p. 3)

Clearly, as the discursive landscape of duck hunting has altered dramatically over the past decade, Fish and Game New Zealand, together with duck hunters, have been forced to present a pro-hunting counter discourse that constructs the shooting of ducks as encompassing “ethical” practices. The duck hunters who participated in my research presented a variety of explanations about how they constructed duck hunting as a legitimate activity. In the remainder of this article, I will outline three of the key ways in which duck hunters have constructed shooting ducks as an ethically legitimate pastime.

### *Legitimization 1: Ethical Killing*

Perhaps the most striking differences between pro-duck hunting discourses and anti-hunting discourses are considerations of the act of killing. To most individuals, living in urbanized and industrialized societies such as New Zealand, killing animals has become an unfamiliar process, making it hard to grasp why hunters choose to shoot animals when there is no longer a dependence on wild animals for food—particularly when meat can be purchased from a supermarket conveniently packaged and “de-animalized.” Over time, as widely accepted “justifications” for hunting in New Zealand have diminished, killing animals has increasingly become framed as an act of perverse pleasure. One of the key anti-hunting discourses generating antipathy toward hunting practices is the notion that hunters hunt for “fun” and “enjoy” killing. The following letter to a newspaper exemplifies this view:

Fish and Game . . . defends duck shooting on the basis that it is a form of farming. There are significant differences. Most farmers consider the actual killing of their animals as the most unpleasant aspect of their occupation. Blood sport enthusiasts take some sort of perverted pleasure in personally killing birds and animals. (*Dick Donaldson*, 2003b, p. 16)

The issue of whether killing was “pleasurable” was an important research question for this study. When asked questions relating to the killing of wildfowl, many duck hunters focus on the issue of making a “clean kill”—that is, killing the birds quickly so that they are dead when they fall from the sky. These two issues are closely connected because generally duck hunters do not consider killing ducks to be a pleasurable activity, rather an activity that entails ideals about killing quickly and humanely. In their attempts to achieve these specific ideals about killing, duck hunters construct a discourse associated with a kind of competence in the countryside: If they meet the requirements; they become “competent” killers. Two key approaches emerged from the research that suggest why duck hunters aim to make a clean shot: (a) a pragmatic desire to see a job done properly and (b) a concern that an animal should suffer as little as possible. The following two interview excerpts illustrate these two approaches:

I try and decoy my ducks and get them close . . . then they're easy for me to hit, easy to pick up, and they're dead. For a start I don't like wasting ammo, I don't like having to send my dog long distances—either down rivers or whatever—it's just inefficient to me. It's an inefficient hunter who takes long shots or wounds ducks. I think it is a big issue to kill your ducks clean and you do that if you're being a good hunter (Craig).

Dad was very anxious to make sure that no duck that he had winged [wounded] was left to die slowly, a horrible painful long-winded death... Dad was very, very concerned that no duck was actually left wounded and suffering. He used to teach us that it was cruel to leave something wounded and that we had to actually either leave it alone all together or kill it humanely and quickly and none of this torturing business—he couldn't stand that sort of thing (Therese).

However, the ideal of a clean kill is not always achieved; therefore, there is a further, ethical responsibility for hunters to find wounded birds as quickly as possible and kill them. Many duck hunters interviewed in this study appeared to take this responsibility seriously. Although the humanitarian aspect may be the first reason for this course of action, there also appears to be an etiquette component. Leaving a duck suffering is just not done. It is bad hunting practice and found to be offensive by the majority of duck hunters I spoke with in this study:

I think most hunters and most shooters that I know of make every endeavor to do that [make a clean shot] and also any bird that is downed, I don't know of anybody who wouldn't go out and try absolutely to get that bird and make sure it was dead—it is just one of the things that you do (Ron).

Killing a wounded duck is, however, a far more intimate process than firing a shotgun at a flying bird. This is usually achieved by wringing the neck, and several hunters found this task to be particularly unpleasant, with some avoiding this hands-on killing by shooting the bird again at close range. Those people who worked on farms or came from farming backgrounds seemed least troubled about killing animals in general and able to cope with the tasks required for killing the birds. For a hunter who identified himself as a "townie," wringing necks was not easy:

Generally Gavin, or one of the boys, wrings their necks—I am not very good at wringing their necks, I am not all that enthused about the idea—shows the 'townie' in me, I guess. Whereas country boys are quite different... Yes, constant exposure certainly takes away any of those strange feelings (Len).

The preceding section has highlighted the complex and ambiguous issues that manifest around the killing of ducks. Duck hunters in New Zealand are generally aware of anti-hunting discourses that frame duck shooting as a kind of perverse activity in which hunters take pleasure in killing. In response, duck hunters have mobilized a counter discourse that places duck-shooting practices within a framework of "ethical" killing. While a clean kill is not always achieved, the duck hunters always intend to cause as little suffering as possible

to the ducks: a discursive position consistently highlighted by hunters. For many duck hunters, killing is not an easy or straightforward task, and the enjoyment they have in participating in duck hunting practices is mitigated to a certain extent by the unpleasant aspects of killing.

### *Legitimization 2: Competence in Nature*

Another key theme behind the legitimization of duck hunting is one of “competence” in nature—something that the duck hunters accord to themselves, but not to anti-hunting protesters. The following section looks at the ways in which duck hunters explain the ethical and competent nature-relationships that are dimensions of shooting ducks.

Many duck hunters feel that those people opposed to duck hunting have unrealistic ideas about nature and emphasize that humans killing animals for food is just participating in the “food-chain,” an important manifestation of evolutionary processes. One hunter’s explanation for this is,

I see that in nature you have only got to look at the way the system works and you see that we very much are a group of animals on earth which peck on each other and are always being eaten by other ones, and it is part of the food chain (Len).

This emphasis on how duck shooting fits in with natural processes was elaborated by some duck hunters to frame anti-hunting protesters as having a “naïve” conception of nature, as opposed to the “realistic” ideals of hunters. There was also a general concern among duck hunters at the risks to personal safety that the protesters sometimes took when protesting—risks that hunters saw being exacerbated by the protesters’ ignorance and naivete. One hunter not only emphasized the danger that activists put themselves in but also provided a dramatic story about some protesters being rescued by duck hunters. As the following interview citation reveals, this hunter perceives animal rights activists as generally being idealistic, young urbanites who are unprepared for the “realities” of the outdoors:

Kids... with no affinity to the outdoors, with the best intentions in the world and with an anthropomorphic unrealistic view of the world, decided that they would go and save the place. Well, you can’t fault them for their intentions but you can fault them for their actions. The hunters had to rescue these kids because it got bitterly cold—they got wet and hypothermia happens with young people very quickly. And they were in trouble and they had to be rescued by the hunters and it was fortunate—and to their credit—that these guys [the hunters] were mature enough and sensible enough to know what to do, and helped these kids out of it. (Maurice).

This story constructs the hunters who rescued the protesters as occupying the moral high ground with their realistic views of nature, while the animal rights activists are portrayed as holding unsound ethical views. The urban “kids” are not as realistic—or adequately knowledgeable about nature—as rural hunters who are able to perform in the wild. For many duck hunters, hunting practices embody natural activities found within nature, exemplifying a particular, discursive position that constructs duck hunting practices as a competent relationship with nature. Many duck hunters consider that the animal rights activists, in contrast, have a relationship with nature that is inconsistent, incompetent, and naïve.

### *Legitimization 3: Wetland Conservation and Responsible Predation*

Many New Zealand duck hunters see wetland conservation and development as an important and morally worthy aspect of contemporary duck hunting. Duck hunters may express this concern for wetland areas through financial contributions toward habitat conservation, but it can also be seen as a feature of the actual shooting of game and the resultant population control. Many hunters argue that they are keeping natural populations within a manageable range, which minimizes damage to the natural environment and ensures there is enough food for sustainable wildfowl populations—and therefore fewer ducks suffering a slow death from starvation. This discourse constructs duck hunters as responsible predators: They are caring for the overall bird species at the same time as acting out the natural behavior of an animal higher on the food chain.

This idea that hunters care for species and the environment in general is reiterated in Heberlein’s (1987) research in the United States. While hunters may kill millions of individual animals, Heberlein argues they also contribute politically and financially to improving the habitats of both game and non-game species (p. 6). This dual role of caretaker/killer is a very confusing dichotomy for non-hunters—particularly when the species being hunted are ducks; birds that have such a general appeal to the broader population. Wildfowl hunting in New Zealand, in common with the United States, also reflects this caretaker/killer dichotomy because Fish and Game New Zealand use a portion of the game-bird license fee collected from duck hunters to maintain and develop wetlands (Hunters help wetland conservation, 2001). One brochure published by Fish and Game emphasizes the importance of duck hunters in the development and maintenance of wetland areas:

Wetlands were once called swamps and had no value in our agricultural economy. Many thousands of hectares were drained for farming and—in the amount of habitat

left for native and introduced birds, fish, and other species—dwindled. Hunters were one of the few groups that opposed this, and the work they did so that game birds could survive helped turn the tide of destruction. *Many of the wetlands that still remain owe their existence to the efforts of hunters* [emphasis in the original] (Hunting is a fact of life, n.d.).

Most hunters in this study were aware that their license fee contributed to wetland conservation and felt this was an important justification for their hunting activities, particularly when these activities were criticized. One hunter argued that although the general public and other environmental organizations may express concern about the loss of wetlands, duck hunters are actually putting money into developing and preserving them:

But habitat creation provides benefits for the non-game species and that's the really good thing. . . . And you get all these well-meaning people . . . being extremely unhappy about the demise of wetlands. We've only got 10 percent of our natural wetlands left now. But they're not doing anything about it! You know, it's the duck hunters and the administrative activities associated with it that are trying to turn the clock back (William).

For many duck hunters who live on farms, their contribution to wetland development is a very personal pond-building project (although this activity is certainly not limited to rural farmers). Building a pond allows duck hunters not only to participate in the natural world that is available but also to build new, natural places. Pond building has become increasingly popular in New Zealand, particularly in the Southland region where the environmental conditions and extensive areas of rural land have made it possible for hundreds of landholders to create small-scale wetland habitats.

Through the building of ponds and a general commitment to wetland conservation and development, duck hunters present a particular discourse that constructs their duck-hunting practices within a "moral landscape" (Proctor, 1998). There is a widely articulated narrative from the duck-hunting community that they are prepared to spend time and money on developing and protecting wetland areas, something that the wider non-hunting public has not done. In carrying out these projects, many species other than ducks and other game birds benefit, and duck hunters often highlight this. Wetland development and conservation activities give some duck hunters enormous pleasure. These projects often involve wider family or groups of friends who enjoy the camaraderie of building nature together. This physical enmeshing of duck hunters within the landscape leads us to a crucial aspect of duck-hunting practices: the importance that many duck hunters place on having an embodied relationship with nature.

Many New Zealand duck hunters understand their activities as being part of a natural relationship with nature, particularly because they also understand themselves as participating in the ecological food chain. This understanding of nature is very much about touching, participating, and immersing oneself in nature in very tangible ways, as well as acting out the "natural" role of predator—an understanding that encapsulates an embodied relationship with nature. However, as we have seen with their pond-building, there is also an important, new emphasis in this embodied, moral predator discourse—that is, that duck hunters maintain and create habitat where birds may live. This weaves together the construction of duck hunters as being both competent in nature and behaving in an ethically appropriate manner: being both killer and caretaker:

Humans do play their part in the whole food-chain circle, like harvesting and eating birds and providing habitat. I don't think they [anti-hunters] understand that . . . hunters provide the habitat and create the environment for birds to live or protect the birds. If it wasn't for hunters the birds probably wouldn't be there (Tylor).

### **Conclusion: The (Contested) Moral(s) of the Story**

In New Zealand, ducks have become important actors in moral fables relating to nature. Understandings of nature are deeply embedded in the moral framework that duck hunters comprehend when carrying out their hunting activities. It is crucial to consider how these ideas about nature are configured because, without this, there can be no dialogue or understanding between the different positions in the hunting debate. When I began talking to duck hunters at the beginning of my research, I was startled by the deep feelings many participants expressed with regard to nature and wildlife such as ducks. Having deep feelings about nature is, of course, nothing unusual—after all, "concern for the environment" is a widely promulgated discourse in contemporary New Zealand society and throughout the industrialized world. What is perhaps confusing about duck hunters' relationship with nature (at least from a non-hunter's perspective) is that they both love nature but also want to kill aspects of it.

Duck hunters see humans as active participants in the food chain who play a part in nature processes. This contrasts markedly with those constructions of nature that favor a visual relationship between humans and the natural world, in which contact with nature is done visually and ideationally—in other words, without disrupting "natural" processes (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). Although non-hunters may still seek out an embodied experience in nature,

this does not normally include killing as part of that experience; many people who oppose hunting see shooting ducks as harming nature, rather than participating in it. Although both hunters and anti-hunting protesters profess a concern for animals, these two groups understand the relationship between humans and animals in very different ways. Animal rights advocates construct the view that animals are like humans (with “cultural,” human rights), whereas hunters construct humans to be like animals (embedded in natural life-cycles and food chains).

This notion of experiencing natural relationships through duck hunting is further expressed in the activities that revolve around wetland development and conservation. Most duck hunters articulate conservationist ideals with regard to preserving and developing New Zealand’s wetlands—a stance that could be interpreted as a strategy to answer criticisms from the wider public. In addition, however, many duck hunters in southern New Zealand have taken on pond-building projects that cannot be explained as being purely “PR” exercises, or efforts to increase hunting opportunities. Rather, for many duck hunters, pond and wetland developments are exercises in “nature-building,” where they understand themselves as enmeshed in a symbiotic relationship with nature. This understanding also incorporates a strong, moral discourse relating to the creation of habitat for many different species (not just game birds), to which duck hunters can point to counter suggestions that their wetland efforts are driven simply by pragmatic motives.

This paper has explored the embodied practices of duck hunting through which duck hunters participate in a “moral landscape” (Proctor, 1998) where, as hybrid human-animals, they enact the legitimate role of predator within the food chain. These embodied practices are a key discourse in contemporary New Zealand duck hunting, which construct hunting as one of the only ways to be in synergy with natural ecological processes and to consummate a truly intimate relationship with nature. In the duck hunters’ construction of this moral fable, shooting a duck does not represent a dreadful act imbued with senseless killing. Rather, it represents a delightful act, a component of the complex relationship that duck hunters have with nature.

## Notes

1. In some parts of the country wild peacocks and wild turkey are also hunted, and Draper (1999) notes that American hunters are coming to New Zealand in increasing numbers to take part in spring turkey shoots (p. 139).
2. Almost without exception, it is males who are associated with this imagery.
3. The intersection between masculinity and duck hunting in New Zealand will be explored in more detail in a forthcoming article.

4. Another important contribution to a legitimizing discourse of duck hunting in the media is the widely perpetuated coding of "rural" in New Zealand as "authentic, real, masculine" and not "hillbilly, backward," or "uncivilized" (an alternative presented in Bell (1997).
5. In one news item, for example, an older duck hunter is described as: "a grand-daddy with 30 years experience on the lake." Another duck hunter discusses his favorite recipe for cooking duck, saying they taste especially good with apricots (TV3, 2002).
6. McLeod (2004, pp. 226-231) gives a more comprehensive comparison of New Zealand and Australian duck hunting debates.
7. During the nineteenth century, a specific sporting code developed in England that focused on the use of the firearm as a means of killing quickly and humanely. This sporting code was inherently imperialist and constructed the hunting activities of non-western peoples as backward and cruel (MacKenzie (1988).

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