

COLLABORATION BETWEEN HUNTERS AND NATURE PROTECTIONISTS IN ITALY

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The relationship between hunters and protectionists in Italy is very fragile and beset with difficulties. The realistic Latin mind and the Roman and catholic tradition have led all natural resources, such as game, to be considered as things to be hunted and used in the Kitchen. Thus the art of hunting and the art of hunting and the art of cooking have developed together historically. The idea that game animals could also be considered solely as an object of spiritual and aesthetic contemplation has been for a long time, and still is, foreign to the ideas and feelings of most Italians. The game harvest does not even constitute, except in a few rare cases, a full time occupation for agricultural workers or foresters as in some other countries. In order to understand the special state of hunting in Italy, perhaps unique in Europe, one must remember that game, in Italian law, is considered as "res nullius" which means that it is not the property of land owners or of the state, but of the first occupant or the first to lay hands on it by shooting or trapping. In other words, the hunter becomes arbitrator and patron of the wildfowl. And besides, after the law of 1923, the "jus prohibendi", also part of Roman law, is no longer in force, by means of which the landowner was able to refuse access to strangers, and thus became indirectly the arbitrator of the wildfowl living on his land. Only in certain cases, when the land is surrounded with effective fencing not less than 1.80 m. high (6 ft.), is access forbidden to strangers. This condition, anyway disliked by the hunters, is in most cases impossible to fulfil because of expense and because it is not always possible to carry it out, and also because in practice on most of the national territory hunting is theoretically "free", insomuch that any person equipped with a hunting licence issued by the Autorità di Pubblica Sicurezza can enter another's land and, during the open season, can hunt without the landowner or the lessee being able to interfere, and independently, of the fact that the game are beneficial or harmful to the land.

Thus the citizen who wants to enjoy the peaceful spectacle of animals in the wild has little possibility to do so, even in his own property. And there are few national parks where some form of hunting is not practised, and even fewer areas where all hunting and professional bird catching is completely forbidden.

This fact has had for consequence a large number of hunters and has not facilitated the diffusion of protectionist opinion. In fact, the Italian hunting law, despite its title “for the protection of game and of the hunting right” is a law inspired by the sport of hunting. The protection envisaged is a function of hunting and is not an end in itself. The question is complicated by the fact that the constitution delegates administration of hunting of the Province while charge of the countryside remains the responsibility of the State. In reality national protectionist legislation still remains to be made, although one can already see the constitutional bases of it. Some efforts at reform of the present law in the last legislature did not lead to conclusive results.

At the present time there are a large number of hunters in Italy (about 1 million), organised in associations; there are also a small number of nature protection societies, formed after the last war, but there is no society on a national scale for the protection of animals which also sets out to protect the wild ones. A large part of Italian public opinion, especially in country districts, still thinks of game in the traditional way while another more cultivated section of public opinion does not seem aware of this question or even remotely interested. Protectionists and hunters, when on common parliamentary ground, are antagonistic to each other at the moment. The fact that among the protectionists there are hunters, or former hunters, is evidence that this antagonism is not always insuperable.

Occasionally in the northern provinces meetings are organised to discuss the common problems of hunting and protection, in which both sides take part and, despite the difference in viewpoint and the strength with which the different opinions are defended, useful points of contact are made.

In Italy as well as elsewhere protectionists and hunters share a love of nature, even if it is in different ways. And despite appearances they have a common interest in the conservation of the object of their passion. To accomplish this end, they must concentrate on the conservation of natural habitats without which wild game cannot exist. In the struggle that will take place in this sphere, they must not consider each other as enemies but as allies fighting for a common cause.

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