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BOWHUNTING DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

More and more European nations are accepting the practice of bowhunting. At the moment there is some sort of bowhunting legalization process ongoing at least in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Iceland. Finland and Denmark are going even further, with Bowhunting of small game and roe deer already allowed, they will initiate a process to legalize bigger game species. Slovakia and Bulgaria have legalized Bowhunting recently. Greenland is allowing bowhunting from 2012 onwards. Meanwhile, in Russia discussions concerning the re-opening of bowhunting are ongoing.

The International Bowhunting Education Program (IBEP) is being used in almost all European nations.

Some nations are interested in the possibility of using bows and arrows in urban areas to manage certain overabundant game populations.

Some facts and general observations about bowhunting:

- Hunting with a bow and arrow is a very effective tool to harvest both small and large game. Modern equipment and educated hunters will have similar or better results in harvesting big game compared to hunters using today's approved hunting tools; shotguns and rifles.
- Bowhunting is a very safe hunting method. The hunter is always in close proximity to the game animal (average 18-20 m), therefore it is easy to verify the target. As one does not walk with a "loaded weapon", there are no accidents involving a bow firing accidentally. The arrows do not fly as far as bullets. Bows are often used for hunting in urban areas where firearms cannot be used, and where deer, pig, hare etc. populations are overabundant. An example: Bowhunters have been used to lower the hare and rabbit populations in Helsinki and other towns in Finland, as well as geese and beaver in some areas. In the USA bowhunters have been used to limit the urban deer numbers.

International Hunter Education Association - 2001 – report/USA:

Of all hunting accidents in the USA, only 1% involved bows or crossbows and some of these accidents were actually tree stand accidents.

- Factors contributing to the growth: Safety, inconspicuousness (unnoticeable), smaller hunting areas, closer to home, easier access to private land, seasons less crowded/earlier (in some countries where separate seasons exist).

An example from Finland: Finnish **Metsähallitus** (*a state enterprise that administers more than 12 million hectares*) started selling separate bowhunting licenses. The archery license is 50 % cheaper than the general license.



Metsähallitus: *“The purpose of a bowhunting license is to allow new hunting possibilities and develop new hunting forms. The license for bowhunters is cheaper because of the nature of bowhunting. The ecological and social side effects are notably smaller than those associated with gun hunting. Bowhunting is very challenging, thus the total harvest is relatively small. Wounding rates are smaller than in general hunting. Bowhunting is a quiet activity, thus acceptable also in more urban or smaller areas and also in protectorates.”*

- Good references from other countries

An example from the USA:

In 1934 the state of Wisconsin held the first archery only deer season

In the 1970s bowhunting accounted for less than 8% of all license sales in the United States.

- 21%, by the late 1990s

- over the last 20 years, from 1.3 million to over 3 million bowhunting licenses sold in 1999 (US)

- at present > 3.5 million

Number of hunters in the USA is declining. The number of hunters, 16 and older, declined by 10 percent between 1996 and 2006 – from 14 million to about 12,5 million. Meanwhile the number of bowhunters has not declined. Most bowhunters also practice other forms of hunting, e.g. with rifles and shotguns.

Bowhunting time line Europe and worldwide

1936 Wisconsin opens the first US bow hunting only season

1945 Yugoslavian republic of Serbia regulates hunting with bow and arrow

1967 Denmark issues personal permits to bow hunters

1986 Portugal legalizes hunting with bow and arrow

1989 Zimbabwe makes it possible to hunt with bow and arrow on a special permit

1992 Lithuania legalizes all hunting with bow and arrow (situation has since changed)

1993 Finland formalizes a long period of unregulated bowhunting

1993 Hungary legalizes all hunting with bow and arrow

1995 France regulates hunting with bow and arrow

1995 Botswana legalizes bowhunting for plains game

1997 Spain makes hunting with bow and arrow possible

1998 Namibia legalizes bowhunting for plains game

1999 Zimbabwe changes the regulations for bowhunting

1999 Denmark regulates bowhunting for roe deer and smaller game

2003 France restructures the regulations for bowhunting allowing shorter bows and release aid

2003 Finland changes the regulation allowing roe deer and beaver to be hunted with bow and arrow

2005 Tanzania legalizes hunting with bow and arrow

2006 Åland legalizes hunting with bow

2007 South Africa makes new regulations for hunting with bow and arrow

2008 Denmark makes the formal change in the law to legalize Bowhunting



2008 France eases regulations for foreign bowhunters as well as young bowhunters

2009 Bulgaria legalizes all hunting with bow and arrow

2009 Slovakia legalizes bowhunting (in enclosures)

2012 Greenland starts the process of accepting the practice of Bowhunting

2012 Lithuania starts a process to re-open bowhunting

Bowhunting is growing all over the world. At the moment there are various ongoing processes to legalize or to further develop bowhunting in many countries.

- Bowhunting contributes to sustainable use = more hunting time / harvested animal. Smaller hunting areas can be used. Sometimes longer hunting seasons (e.g. USA).
- Long tradition. A hunting method which is tens of thousands of years old.
An example: In Finland people have been bowhunting since the ice age ended, and the Nordic parts of Europe were populated. Therefore, there has always been bowhunters in this country, and bowhunting has never been forbidden.
- Bowhunters need to be qualified hunters (national hunter education). It is possible to add supplementary bowhunting education to the basic education. The IBEP (International Bowhunter Education Program) is a ready-made package with a manual, instructors manual, DVDs and lots of other material (also good for non-bowhunters!) www.nbef.org. A mandatory shooting test is also required by some nations (e.g. Åland, Denmark). The IBEP is the only multinational hunting education program in use today. The IBEP program is used in most of European countries, including countries where bowhunting is not allowed (traveling hunters).
- Numbers are also growing in Europe.
An example: The Finnish Bowhunting Association was established in 1982 by some tens of bowhunters. At the beginning of 2000 there were an estimated 5000 bowhunters in Finland. The results of a study entitled "The Profile of Hunter", conducted (2009) by *Anna-Liisa Toivonen* of Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute shows that the number of hunters using bows and arrows is 8 900 and that they have 10 900 hunting bows. At the moment the estimation (according to archery product dealers) is 15 000. The number of bowhunters in Europe can only be estimated. The European Bowhunting Federation (EBF) has estimated the total number to be over 35.000 (2011).
- The number of hunters is declining in many nations. When recruiting new hunters it is often easier to attract young people to bowhunting versus other hunting methods. An example from Finland: **Jouni Tanskanen**, Executive Manager of Game Management, Game Management District North Savo: *"In 2008 every Finnish Game Management District -15 in total - each received a Genesis bow for youth education. We have noticed that young people are very interested in archery and in turn hunting as a whole."*



- **Wounding?**

During last 20+ years there have been some (only a few) pictures in the media/on the internet of animals carrying an arrow in their body. Unfortunately some people (most probably children) who are not hunters have used youth bows or “toy crossbows” with non-hunting arrow tips for shooting at animals. With a weak bow and an arrow tip which is not suitable for hunting, the arrow’s penetration is poor and it sticks out of the body. An arrow shot from an average modern hunting bow fully penetrates both deer sized animals and many larger animals. Therefore, there is no risk of animals running through the forest with arrows sticking out from their bodies. If an animal is wounded with a gun, it is not as “appealing” to the general public, yet it does not receive as much attention. The non-vital area wound caused by a bullet is no better than a wound caused by a razor sharp broadhead (obviously less tissue damage caused by the cutting edge than a soft nose bullet). Wounding is one of the main concerns among people who do not know about bowhunting and modern bowhunting tools. According to various studies bowhunters do not wound more animals than other hunters; on the contrary, it is normally less. A Danish study, conducted over a 7 period showed that the wounding rate was less than 5 %.
- **Poaching?**

Another thing people who are unfamiliar with bowhunting may worry about is “Quiet weapons”. In reality bowhunters, just like any hunters, need to practice and be good hunters (to get close enough to game). One cannot shoot with a bow from a car; bows are more difficult to use in the dark etc., therefore not a poacher’s weapon of choice! In many countries it is legal to use a silencer on a rifle. According to the Finnish authorities (ministry) poaching with bows has never been a topic of concern. There are much better tools for poachers (i.e. criminals)!
- Bows and arrows are not used for acts of public violence, such as murders, school shootings and bank robberies. Knives, axes, cast iron frying pans, fists and heavy boots are much more dangerous “weapons” according to any daily newspaper.
- In countries where bowhunting is not legal, some hunters may oppose it because they feel they would lose something if bowhunting were to be legalized. In the reality all hunters would have more choices (rifle, shotgun, bow, traps, dogs, falcons...). In some cases all may win. For example in the US the hunting seasons can be longer when there are special seasons for hunters using bows and muzzle loaders. If it were only rifles that were allowed, the deer seasons would be much shorter.
- The modern bows, arrows and hunting tips (broadheads) are as effective as any shot or bullet. Whichever hunting weapon one chooses – be it a bow, a rifle or a shotgun – one has to know how to use it, be proficient and able to put the bullet or arrow in the correct spot on the game animal (shot placement) and understand when to do it (morale).

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