

Diversity Is Strength!

It's Also...Poaching

BY BRENDA WALKER

Among America's outdoors-loving environmentalists, appreciation for the shared bounty and beauty of nature is a strong value. Hikers snap a photo of a beautiful flower rather than pick it. "Take only pictures, leave only footprints" is the ideal—one which is mostly followed...by Americans.

In addition, American hunters are some of the best protectors of animals, because they understand that obeying the legal limits means the supply of deer, ducks and other game will extend into the future. That's the hunting ethic.

But when immigrants from non-conservationist countries (that would be most of them) see America's natural riches, eyeballs turn to dollar signs. Greedy foreigners plot the theft of our shared natural heritage, in the crime generically known as poaching.

Indeed, one of the most horrendous mass murders of recent years started out as a poaching incident. Hmong immigrant Chai Vang shot eight and killed six Wisconsin hunters who found him on property owned by two of their group. Vang was perched in a private tree stand in hopes of shooting a deer. When he was ordered to leave, Vang attacked the Americans, all but one of whom were unarmed. Four were shot in the back, and 20-year-old Joey Crotteau was killed after he ran nearly 500 feet.

Brenda Walker would rather hug a tree than an illegal alien. In non-hugging moments, she publishes ImmigrationsHumanCost and blogs daily on LimitsToGrowth.org.

Clearly, some poachers take their thieving very seriously. It doesn't help that Hmong values do not include respect for private property.

Many forms of poaching bring big money for little effort, particularly since species loss means that individual creatures then become more valuable with their scarcity. And foreign thieves often follow their cultural background in focusing on a species to victimize.

Russian immigrants, for example, appear to be the main actors in the sturgeon/caviar poaching here in northern California. Last May, the Department of Fish and Game busted a sturgeon-poaching ring with the arrest of nine Russians—including the owner of the Gastronom Russian Deli in San Francisco.

The Bay Area species of freshwater sturgeon is a substantial creature when allowed to reach maturity. In the 1800s, sturgeon were abundant. "Back in those days it was not uncommon to see incredibly large, 12-foot sturgeon pushing 1,000 pounds and upwards of 100 years old," said Marty Gingras, a supervising biologist at the California Department of Fish

and Game. ["Beluga ban boosts California caviar," by Carolyn Said, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 7, 2006] Bars served caviar free, like popcorn or peanuts today. But overfishing reduced the species to the point where all Bay Area sturgeon fishing was banned for the first half of the twentieth century. Today limited fishing is permitted for individuals, and no fish gotten in sport fishing may be sold.

Russian sturgeon is threatened with extinction in the Caspian Sea, so last October the U.S. government banned the importation of beluga caviar. Caviar from wild sturgeon is more desired than the farmed product, but thieves have also stolen fish from the tanks of aquaculturalists. The poaching



Hmong immigrant Chai Vang killed six Wisconsin hunters.

problem is so severe that the population of Bay Area sturgeon has fallen by half since the late 1990s.

Unsurprisingly, the price of California caviar has risen to over \$250 per pound on the black market.

Further north up the California coast, the poaching object of interest is abalone, a tasty mollusk. Back in the 1960s, abalone was abundant, harvested commercially with up to five million pounds taken annually. But overfishing seriously depleted the stock, leading to a ban on commercial harvesting in 1997.

In earlier days, abalone could be picked from rocks at low tide. But acquiring fresh abalone now requires diving in some depth of ocean water to find the creatures. Regulations starting in 2002 permit individuals a limit of 24 abalone per season, tracked on a punch card to be filled in by the diver.

Abalone is particularly valued in Asian cuisine, and a poacher in the 1990s could make \$100,000 per year. Many of the perps have been Chinese and Vietnamese, filling a demand in Chinatown restaurants and markets.

Another poaching crime: the case of Omid Adhami, a foreigner who used a speargun to kill a giant sea bass, friendly enough to local divers to have a name, in La Jolla Ecological Reserve.

“When authorities intercepted the vessel, they discovered Blackie—a 50-something-year-old giant black sea bass weighing 171 pounds—skewered. The slain fish, a protected species, had been friendly to swimmers in the cove since the 1950s, says lifeguard Sgt. John Sandmeyer.

“There are groups that are breaking [into] tears over this,” he says.

“State law prohibits killing the fish species, gentle giants once harvested to the brink of extinction. [“Sorry end for cove’s mascot”]

At trial, a game warden compared the killing to “going out to a dairy and shooting a cow.” (Or, perhaps, chasing a horse to death).

The perp had a long rap sheet, couldn’t be

expected to exhibit sportsman-like qualities, and indeed shouldn’t have been in the country at all:

“Adhami has six felony convictions for auto theft, receiving stolen property, burglary and insurance fraud and has served two and a half years in state prison. Adhami also is an undocumented immi-

grant who could be deported to his native Iran at any time, according to court records.” (“Three plead not guilty in killing of protected fish,” by Terry Rodgers, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 3, 2005.)

Some might argue that poaching is a nuisance crime and not

important. The killing of the sea bass Blackie was a misdemeanor. It didn’t even get Adhami deported.

Poaching properly refers to animals, but the plant kingdom has been hit by rip-offs also. Illegal aliens have discovered the green riches available in the Olympic National Park—on the ocean-facing peninsula of western Washington and containing a rare temperate rainforest which receives over 140 inches of rainfall per year, so the foliage is extraordinarily lush and varied—and other protected areas in the northwest. A hard-picking illegal alien can easily earn \$75 daily harvesting greenery for floral arrangements.

One popular species is salal, admired for its smooth, dark green leaves. Your next floral arrangement may be partially adorned with ill-gotten greens.

The whole idea of national parks is to have a protected space for nature where nothing gets picked, period. Parks are not safeguarded so that illegal aliens can make a living stripping them bare.

In California’s Sequoia National Park, the main problem is not what’s taken, but what has



Lake Sturgeon



Canned Abalone

been added. Mexican drug gangs have taken over large areas to grow marijuana, complete with armed guards. In 2004, authorities pulled 44,000 plants out of the park, worth around \$176 million.

In the last few years, the National Park Department has issued occasional lists of the most dangerous parks—and they don't mean mountain lions. Heading up the list was Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, where Ranger Kris Eggle was shot and killed in 2002 by Mexican drug smugglers. Parts of Sequoia, including the Kaweah River drainage and areas off Mineral King Road, are no-go zones for visitors and park rangers during the April-to-October growing season, when drug lords cultivate pot on an agribusiness-scale fit for the Central Valley. The list includes Yosemite, one of our crown jewels

The growers poach wildlife, spill pesticides, divert water from streams and dump tons of trash. Last November 17, Laura Whitehouse testified before Congress on behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association that insufficient resources to deal with the damage done by Mexican drug cartels means a degraded park experience for American school children. Sequoia National Park spent \$50,000 in fiscal year 2005 to clear out garbage, miles of irrigation hose, and other debris left behind when the marijuana gardens were abandoned or eradicated. In 2002, the Park Service was forced to refuse about half of the school groups requesting ranger-led education programs because it had to devote significant resources instead to combating the park's marijuana problem.

Yet enforcement lags. Rangers say they lack helicopters and manpower. Elected officials have other priorities, including homeland security and fighting drug cartels in Latin America.

One measure of the government's shocking inattention to U.S. parks: 60 helicopters and about \$4 billion have been sent to Colombia since 2000 to pursue drug eradication there. Yet the 2005 budget for dealing with drug crime in the park has been cut by half, and there are no helicopters available. ["War of the Weed," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 9, 2005.]

The park policy is another example of Washington putting America last. Actual homeland pro-

tection is less important than riding herd on the world's affairs and acting as a superpower. The Mexican army has made hundreds of "incursions" across our border with no complaint from President Bush, and Mexican drug cartels are effectively annexing our treasured national parks. Yet Washington's attention remains elsewhere.

The fact that nature preserves have become dangerous places is another immigration-driven nail in the coffin of American quality of life. Campers of a decade back didn't have to worry about getting killed by Mexican drug cartels occupying public parklands.



Memorial to slain National Park Service Ranger Kris Eggle

You loaded up your gear and headed out for the wild country, where the only danger might be having insufficient insect repellent. But these days, savvy hikers would be wise to include safety in the mix when deciding where to trek, and avoid parks where they might get chased away at gun point. Young people now don't have the pleasure of open spaces—wild animals, spectacular vistas, and the ease of reaching them—that Baby Boomers accepted as part of our American heritage just a few decades ago.

As a local diver remarked about the Blackie fish-killing case: "There is nothing more boring than an empty ocean."

Except maybe an over-full country—stripped of its flora and fauna, and ultimately its identity, by lawless foreigners. ■