

## Trophy Hunting: Unnatural Selection

A few weeks ago the Chieftain ran a guest essay opposed to tourist hunting along with a photo of a hunter with the bull elk he had killed with a bow. A few years ago an article ran about a hunter who killed a record bighorn ram along with a photo of the animal, the hunter, and his high powered rifle. In both cases the animals were magnificent specimens. Genetically they were probably in the top 5-10 percent of their species' characteristics. Both photos made me wonder why these hunters selected the best of a species to kill. But of course I know why they chose these particular animals... for bragging rights to their friends. This is the opposite of species survival based on Natural Selection. When species evolution occurs during natural selection it is the weakest members that die first since they are the most vulnerable to predation. Predators do not select the members which put up the strongest resistance. If you are looking for dinner why complicate your life? For thousands of years humans have incorrectly wondered about how characteristic traits are passed along from one generation to the next (other animals are too busy surviving to worry about it) and also why there is variation from one generation to the next.

From ancient Greek thinkers to the Eugenics of the Nazi era humans have proposed wacky theories of inheritance. It was thought mini perfect humans were contained in the male semen and need only be inflated in the mother's womb; all the traits were contained in the male, the female was merely an incubator; and of course this fit with Christian beliefs in original sin leading all the way back to Adam. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century these ancient theories faced bankruptcy, science was coming.

In 1831-32 Charles Darwin made his famous five year trip on the HMS *Beagle* and proceeded to collect samples of animals and plants in the New World. Darwin would study these samples the rest of his life and it would lead him to a revolution in thinking about how species develop. Species evolved through Natural Selection. In the same era a monk named Gregory Mendel began breeding pea plants and recording each generation's trait and concluded that heredity was based on single unitary traits, which later we labeled the gene. Both Darwin and Mendel did not have electron microscopes but had concluded that traits were passed along by what we now call The Gene.

Today we understand a great deal about genetics and researchers have begun to question the correctness of killing the best of each species, trophy hunting.

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