



On the Hunt: An Insight into the Swedish Hunting Culture

UK based documentary photographer Eddie Stenstrom traveled to his home country of Sweden to document the traditions and heritage of its hunting culture.

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Photo Essay by Eddie Stenstrom



The start of a hunting day is organized by a hunting team leader who has decided the type of hunt it will be, based on which animal is hunted. Dogs are an integral part of hunting as they are trained by their dog handler/owner to search for scents. Common hunting dogs are the dachshund (hunts deer) or a Spitz breed like the Swedish Elkhound (hunts elk and bear).







Upon meeting, the leader shares the plan of approach and the hunters are given a position/post ensuring people are strategically located throughout the dedicated hunting area. The dog handles (usually one or two people) release the dogs when all the hunters are in position, and the hunt begins.





The hunter is equipped with a few technical devices that are standard in modern hunting. The hunting radio lets the hunters communicate in remote locations where there is no mobile network. Common phrases for communication can be, “the dog seems to have picked up something” or “the movement of the dog indicates it's a deer”. The dog handlers have handheld GPS devices where they track the dog who wears a GPS collar. Sometimes hunters can determine what animal the dog has found through its movements and speed. Hunters know their own dogs' characteristics and behaviours better than anyone else.







The environment itself can be an indicator of what animals have recently been present in the area. Snow can reveal tracks in the snow and wild boar will destroy/tear up the ground. But when the dog gives out continuous firm barks it is an indicator it has located an animal.



The next plan of action is for the hunter to determine movements for the best strategic offence. The wind direction is one of the most important elements. You do not want the wind to carry the hunters sent towards the hunted animal, it will detect your smell long before the hunter can see it.



The standard hunting weapons in hunting are either a shotgun, ball gun class or a combined. The shotgun is for example used when hunting deer, requiring a more reflexive shooting style for fast moving targets. Whereas the ball gun is used when hunting elk.





The Swedish hunting culture has a great deal of youth engagement and young hunters. Heritage is one reason the culture is positive towards parents bringing their children on a hunt. It is seen as a connecting, bonding and educating experience which early on introduces the child to their cultural community. This is why hunting is quite generational in Sweden and why many parents who hunt become supervisors when their children are studying for their hunting licence.






Sweden is a country that conducts sustainable hunting (harvesting the revenue). Its acceptance of hunting is high due to the utilisation of the animal meat. It is considered environmentally friendly. The traditions surrounding the culture are not considered upper class, in fact it embraces people of all social classes. Whilst it is still a very male dominated activity there is a considerable increase to advocate for more women and their voice.



Hunting is also a social activity, for instance, during lunch time or after a hunt the team gathers to make a fire and people grill sausages and have prepared sandwiches that they have with a cup of coffee. It is a way to warm up as the winter hunts can be very cold, especially for the hunters sitting on post.



The hunt can sometimes be quiet and challenging where nothing is
shot, whilst other times it sings in the forest.

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