



Wildlife  
Fear Wildlife  
Wisconsin

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## David Horst column: Attacks on wildlife deserve our outrage

What in the world? Disbelief and complete bafflement. And anger.

It was the only way to react to the news that a group of snowmobilers had viciously chased down and tortured five deer on the outskirts of Waupaca.

Then, with the outrage still cresting, some yahoo decides to skip his snowmobile over a flock of mallards in an open spot in the Fond du Lac River — twice — leaving 57 dead ducks behind.

To no one's surprise, three 20-something guys appear to be responsible for the deer massacre. Do you suppose we will find out alcohol was involved?

Dragging a deer with a rope. Leaving one tied to a tree to strangle itself. Even killing a fawn.

As the details come out, this stupid act is turning out to be even more depraved than guys hopped up on tavern stops and horsepower between their legs taking leave of their senses for a few minutes. This was systematic torture.

With all of the attention and condemnation focused on the deer abusers, how does someone then decide to go out and run down ducks? It has the feel of an unsettling game of copycat. Stopping that requires that people be shown that abusing wildlife carries serious consequences.

What does it say about snowmobilers as a group? Nothing.

About as much as what one fan of movie thrillers turning homicidal says about everyone else in the multiplex.

Other snowmobilers were the guys trying to get information on who did it, contributing to the \$10,000 reward fund and offering to shut down a whole county's trails to show how seriously they were taking what happened.

That's admirable. That's policing your own sport.

These acts only speak about the four or five guys that appear to be responsible. They say these guys

are dangerous. Not all, but enough, animal abusers go on to transfer their sadism to people that the assaults need to be dealt with severely.

For many, a snow machine is a means of getting back into wild areas you can't see from the highway, or even imagine them being there. It's a way to get out with friends and embrace the long, hard winter.

Still, these events might make you question whether the purpose of being in the woods is to enjoy nature, or to dominate it. Ripping through the countryside on a snowmobile or four-wheeler, or carving up a lake and everybody's tranquility on a personal watercraft in the summer, can be about beating nature rather than admiring it.

Personally, I'd rather do it on skis or snowshoes, in a kayak or on a bike, but that's just me. For some, it's an issue of not being physically able to get out any other way. Others just think more horsepower means more fun. Time outdoors is good for the soul and variety makes us interesting.

This kind of behavior will also raise questions about whether mixed-use trails are a good idea. It's one more piece of evidence that trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and skiing don't mix with powerful machines in the hands of people with suspect blood-alcohol levels.

And, of course, there should be this level of outrage, and more, about neglected children, abused spouses and victims of bullies. Those things shouldn't happen, but neither should this.

Why can't we enjoy nature instead of having to defeat it? The woods, the waterways — they're wondrous. Slowing down to enjoy them wouldn't be a bad idea.

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